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FANTASY FICTION

THE HARDWOOD PILE . L. Sprague de Camp

A Yankee lumberman gets into a bit of trouble about a Norway maple. It had a sort of dryad inhabiting—and she was most annoyed. So, for that matter, was—

WATCH THAT WINDOW! . . . L. Joe Fohn

The banker was willing to pay him good cash money to stay in the house, though the house already had an inhabitant—who went around chasing ghosts with a Flit gun full of ghost-layer!

THE EXTRA BRICKLAYER . . . A. M. Phillips

He didn't demand any pay, laid more bricks per hour than any other man on the job, and never got in anybody's way—but the boss tried hard to fire him. Even the police tried. But he had a trick of vanishing—

THE *Devil* MAKES THE LAW! by Robert Heinlein

If magic works—why not Magic, Inc!

"Boys, in 1 minute through that door will come our new star salesman—"

JUST when we had got to thinking our sales were doing extra all right, J. P., the sales manager, whammed home the old body punch at the first-of-the-month meeting.

"Boys," he said, "in just one minute, through that door will come our new star salesman . . . and I expect every man to cooperate with him to the fullest."

No kiddin', a pin dropping would have sounded like an exploding bombshell. Jim Smith looked at me, I stared at Ed Johnson. What was going on? Who was this newcomer? What kind of a bird would he be? Who was going to be "fired"? J. P. sure had us in a dither—and I mean dither!

And then, through the door staggered the office boy carrying a tray as big as a cart wheel. On top of it stood twelve big, gleaming bottles of Listerine Antiseptic.

J. P. grabbed the nearest one off the tray and slammed it down on the desk.

"Here he is," he bellowed, "and none of you guys had better laugh, either. For a long time I've noticed that some of you men—and I'm not mentioning any names, all too frequently have a breath that would knock a cow down. It all adds up to this: *If I've noticed it, customers must have noticed it, too.* And that's bound to be bad for business. After coming up against a case of halitosis a couple of times, a customer is entitled to close the door on you—*for keeps.*"

We all stirred uneasily.

"From now on," J. P. continued, "this is an order; take a swig of Listerine Antiseptic every morning before you hit the street. Get that? Not now and then after a big night . . . but *every* morning. Step up, gentlemen, and get your bottle."

Maybe J. P. was right, and maybe it's only coincidence, but I'm doggoned if the sales for the next six months weren't better, in spite of a lot of tricky stuff from our competitors.

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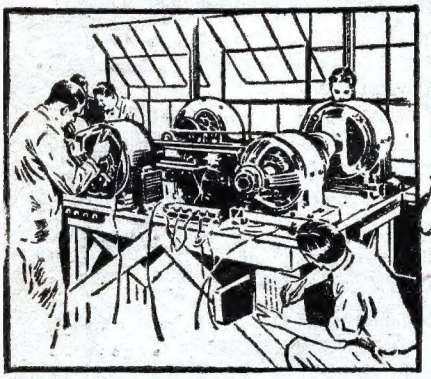

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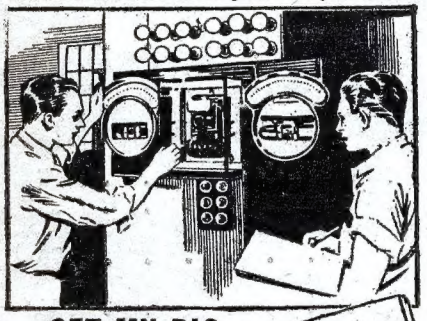

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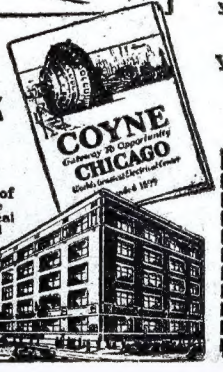

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The Readers speak their minds.

Illustrations by: Cartier, R. Isip and Kramer

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All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

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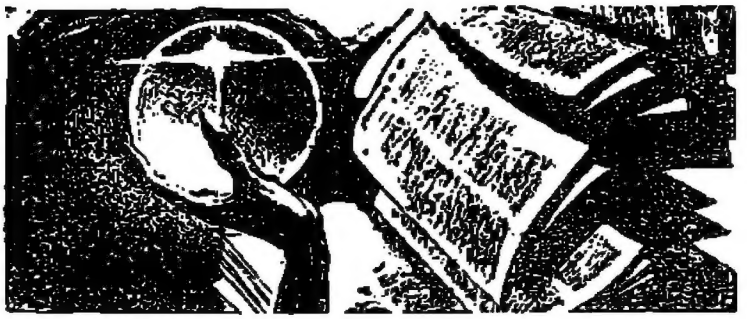


OF THINGS BEYOND

SINCE Robert Heinlein was in here recently and suggested the little brain teaser, we've been mentally confused over a rather lovely proposition: Find a general, positive statement using the word "all" which is absolutely and strictly correct and provable. "All men are mortal" won't do, unless you have personally examined all men with the aid of qualified experts. (If you did, you might find the Wandering Jew; until you do, you can't *know* he doesn't exist.)

As a matter of fact, the English language is beautifully choked and distorted with such word pitfalls as "all," guaranteed to get any logical argument turned into a series of unintentional dogmatic statements. It's a heritage of the time when the Greeks figured dogma was the only way to get anywhere. The injection of a little undetected dogma is usually helpful in an argument, which probably makes people reluctant to shed it.

But so long as "everybody says so" passes current as a sound reason —without resort to census figures and appropriate surveys—it remains difficult to argue, or even think for one's own amusement, in a purely logical manner. It makes one feel remarkably feeble to talk for five minutes with a strict observation of the rules of evidence, logic, and resort to the world-as-it-is. Try it some time, leaving out—unless you can prove you've a right to them in strict application—the words *all, ever, every, always, never, impossible,* and—which is particularly difficult—the verb *to be* in the dogmatic sense. (That verb is a prize for trickery! "This is a book." *Is* it? How do you know? You don't mean "This exists a book," you mean "One

calls this a book." With so simple a thing as a book, there seems little difference, but when someone says "This is science," or "This is great and noble and new," it changes it considerably to say "One calls this—")

Which might also boil down to the suggestion that statements to the effect that "That's impossible. Science proves otherwise; such things never happen nor can happen!" should be changed to fit the facts of the world-as-it-is, and not merely the present customs of the language, to "That, one calls impossible. Present knowledge tends to indicate otherwise. There is no accepted data to show that such things have yet happened, nor to indicate they can happen."

It would be nice to call a spade a spade—but sometimes your eyesight's poor and it's really a snow shovel.

Which leads to our final triumphant statement:

"Everyone—except the major portion of the human race, residing in the greater part of the Earth's habitable surface—knows that magic is impossible. Reports of its reality—by practically all observers and practically the entire Earth's population, over a period of some six thousand years—are sheer nonsense."

The question of magic being thus summarily settled, we turn to the impossibility offered for next month. To wit: "The Wheels of If."

De Camp sprang the plot of this on us a while back and amused us both with the suggested yarn and his background idea. What would the world be like *if* Leif Ericson had settled America, or *if* there'd never been an American Revolution, or *if* the Vikings had conquered Britain first and bounced William the Conqueror out on his ear when he tried later?

And what *if* a rising New York would-be district attorney, with success in sight—got picked up into one of those worlds of if when a dirty political deal involved heaving an unwanted man out of that world of if?

That's the general idea. And my, my, what screwy deals Allister Parks, ex-would-be D. A. can think up! They got him caught in a dirty deal—but they caught the wrong gentleman!

THE EDITOR.

I Jumped My Pay from $18 to $50 a Week!

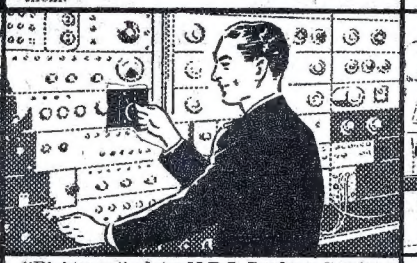
Here's how I did it

by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

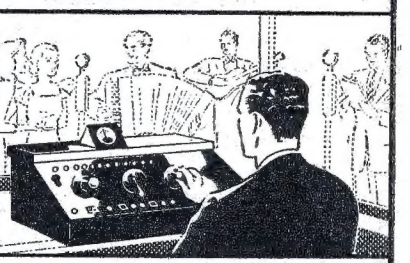
"I had an $18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."

"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make $5 to $10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."

"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N.R.I. Graduate Service Department sent me to Station KWCR as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUI. I am also connected with Television Station W9XK."



"N. R. I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast."

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Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N.R.I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open many good jobs soon.

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The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make $5 to $10 a week extra in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

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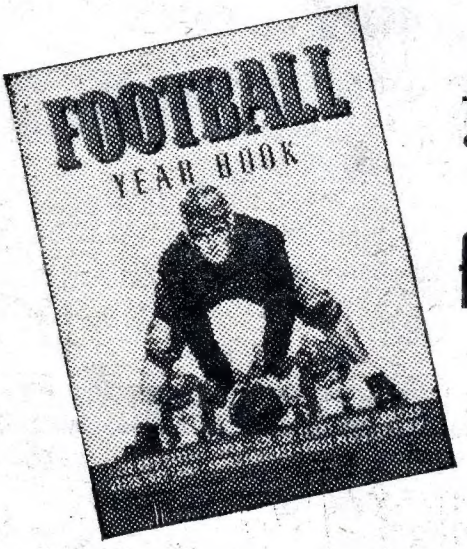

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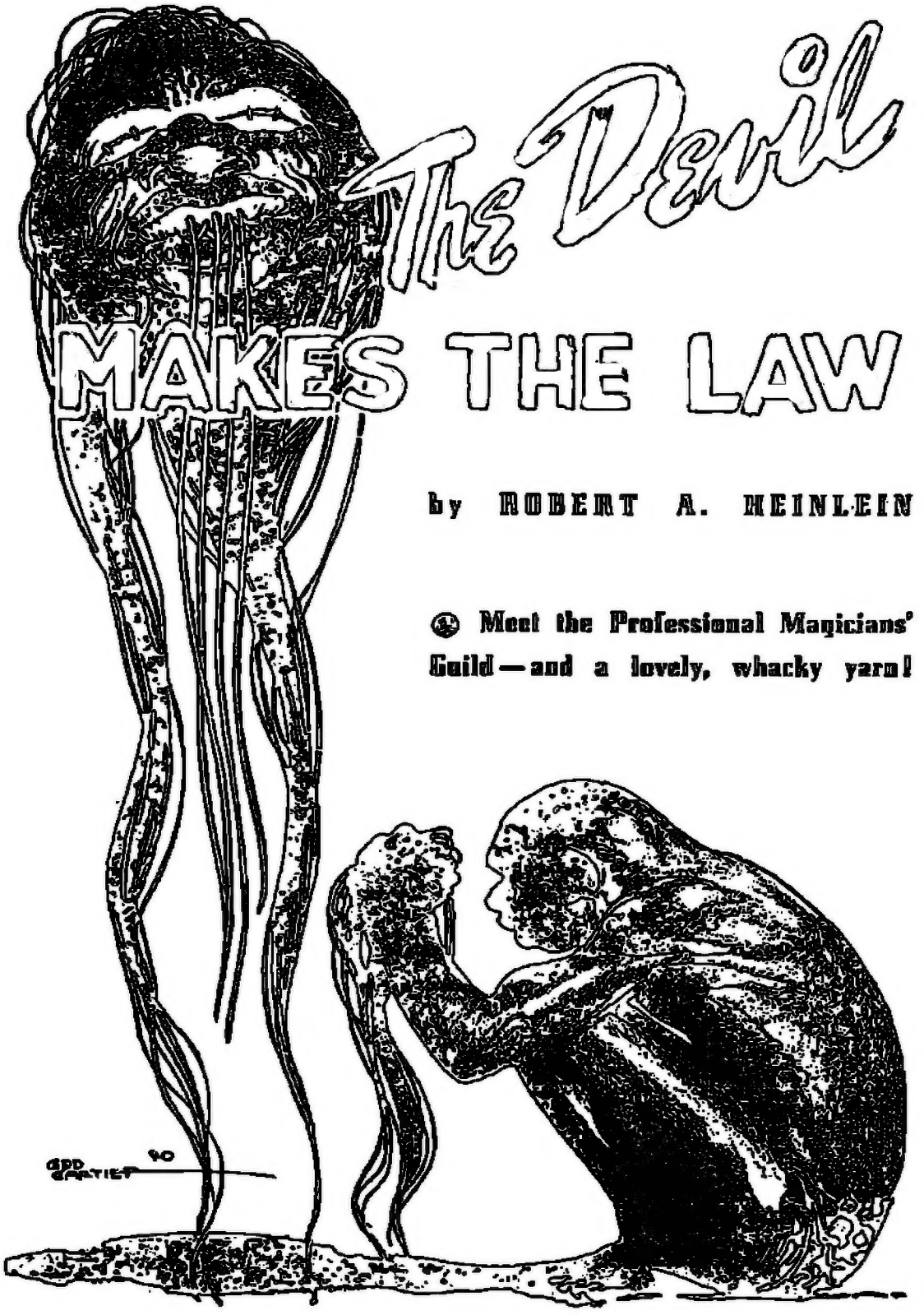

The Devil MAKES THE LAW

by ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

Meet the Professional Magicians' Guild — and a lovely, whacky yarn!

"WHOSE spells are you using, buddy?"

That was the first thing this bird said after coming into my place of business. He had hung around maybe twenty minutes, until I was alone, looking at samples of waterproof pigment, fiddling with plumbing catalogues, and monkeying with the hardware display.

I didn't like his manner. I don't mind a legitimate business inquiry from a customer, but I resent gratuitous snooping.

"Various of the local licensed practitioners of thaumaturgy," I told him in a tone that was chilly but polite. "Why do you ask?"

"You didn't answer my question," he pointed out. "Come on—speak up. I ain't got all day."

I restrained myself. I require my clerks to be polite, and, while I was pretty sure this chap would never be a customer, I didn't want to break my own rules. "If you are thinking of buying anything," I said, "I will be happy to tell you what magic, if any, is used in producing it, and who the magician is."

"Now you're not being co-operative," he complained. "We like for people to be co-operative. You never can tell what bad luck you may run into not co-operating."

"Who d'you mean by 'we,'" I snapped, dropping all pretense of politeness, "and what do you mean by 'bad luck'?"

"Now we're getting somewhere," he said with a nasty grin, and settled himself on the edge of the counter so that he breathed into my face. He was short and swarthy—Sicilian, I judged—and dressed in a suit that was overtailored. His clothes and haberdashery matched perfectly in a color scheme that I didn't like. "I'll tell you what I mean by 'we'; I'm a field representative for an organization that protects people from bad luck—if they're smart, and co-operative. That's why I asked you whose charms you're usin'. Some of the magicians around here aren't co-operative; it spoils their luck, and that bad luck follows their products."

"Go on," I said. I wanted him to commit himself as far as he would.

"I knew you were smart," he answered. "F'r instance—how would you like for a salamander to get loose in your shop, setting fire to your goods and maybe scaring your customers? Or you sell the materials to build a house, and it turns out there's a poltergeist living in it, breaking the dishes and souring the milk and kicking the furniture around. That's what can come of dealing with the wrong magicians. A little of that and your business is ruined. We wouldn't want that to happen, *would we?*" He favored me with another leer.

I said nothing; he went on, "Now, we maintain a staff of the finest demonologists in the business, expert magicians themselves, who can report on how a magician conducts himself in the Half World, and whether or not he's likely to bring his clients bad luck. Then we advise our clients whom to deal with, and keep him from having bad luck. See?"

I saw all right—I wasn't born yesterday. The magicians I dealt with were

local men that I had known for years, men with established reputations both here and in the Half World. They didn't do anything to stir up the elementals against them, and they did not have bad luck.

WHAT this slimy item meant was that I should deal only with the magicians they selected at whatever fees they chose to set, and they would take a cut on the fees and also on the profits of my business. If I didn't choose to "co-operate," I'd be persecuted by elementals they had an arrangement with —renegades, probably, with human vices—my stock in trade spoiled and my customers frightened away. If I still held out, I could expect some really dangerous black magic that would injure or kill me. All this under the pretense of selling me protection from men I knew and liked.

A neat racket!

I had heard of something of the sort back East, but had not expected it in a city as small as ours.

He sat there, smirking at me, waiting for my reply, and twisting his neck in his collar, which was too tight. That caused me to notice something —in spite of his foppish clothes, a thread showed on his neck just above the collar in back. It seemed likely that it was there to support something next to his skin—an amulet. If so, he was superstitious, even in this day and age.

"There's something you've omitted," I told him. "I'm a seventh son, born under a caul, and I've got second sight. My luck's all right, but I can see bad luck hovering over you like cypress over a grave!" I reached out and snatched at the thread. It snapped and came loose in my hand. There was an amulet on it, right enough, an unsavory little wad of nothing in particular and about as appetizing as the bottom of a bird cage. I dropped it on the floor and ground it into the dirt.

He had jumped off the counter and stood facing me, breathing hard. A knife showed up in his right hand; with his left hand he was warding off the evil eye, the first and little fingers pointed at me, making the horns of Asmodeus. I knew I had him—for the time being.

"Here's some magic you may not have heard of," I rapped out, and reached into a drawer behind the counter. I hauled out a pistol and pointed it at his face. "Cold iron! Now go back to your owner and tell him there's cold iron waiting for him, too—both ways!"

He backed away, never taking his eyes off my face. If looks could kill, and so forth. At the door he paused and spat on the doorsill, then got out of sight very quickly.

I put the gun away and went about my work, waiting on two customers that came in just as Mr. Nasty Business left. But I will admit that I was worried. A man's reputation is his most valuable asset. I've built up a name, while still a young man, for dependable products. It was certain that this bird and his pals would do all they could to destroy that name—which might be plenty if they were hooked in with black magicians!

Of course, the building-materials game does not involve as much magic

as other lines dealing in less durable goods. People like to know, when they are building a home, that the bed won't fall into the basement some night, or the roof disappear and leave them out in the rain.

Besides, building involves quite a lot of iron, and there are very few commercial sorcerers who can cope with cold iron. The few that can are so expensive it isn't economical to use them in building. Of course, if one of the café-society crowd, or somebody like that, wants to boast that they have a summerhouse or a swimming pool built entirely by magic, I'll accept the contract, charging accordingly, and sublet it to one of the expensive, first-line magicians. But by and large my business uses magic only in the side issues—perishable items and doodads which people like to buy cheap and change from time to time.

So I was not worried about magic *in* my business, but about what magic could *do* to my business—if someone set out deliberately to do me mischief. I had the subject of magic on my mind, anyhow, because of an earlier call from a chap named Ditworth—not a matter of vicious threats, just a business proposition that I was undecided about. But it worried me, just the same—

I CLOSED UP a few minutes early and went over to see Jedson—a friend of mine in the cloak-and-suit business. He is considerably older than I am, and quite a student, without holding a degree, in all forms of witchcraft, white and black magic, necrology, demonology, spells, charms, and the more practical forms of divination. Besides that, Jedson is a shrewd, capable man in every way, with a long head on him. I set a lot of store by his advice.

I expected to find him in his office, and more or less free, at that hour, but he wasn't. His office boy directed me up to a room he used for sales conferences. I knocked and then pushed the door.

"Hello, Archie," he called out as soon as he saw who it was. "Come on I've got something." And he turned away.

I came in and looked around. Besides Joe Jedson there was a handsome, husky woman about thirty years old in a nurse's uniform, and a fellow named August Welker, Jedson's foreman. He was a handy all-around man with a magician's license, third class. Then I noticed a fat little guy, Zadkiel Feldstein, who was agent for a good many of the second-rate magicians along the street, and some few of the first-raters. Naturally, his religion prevented him from practicing magic himself; but as I understand it, there was no theological objection to his turning an honest commission. I had had dealings with him; he was all right.

This ten-percenter was clutching a cigar that had gone out, and watching intently Jedson and another party, who was slumped in a chair.

This other party was a girl, not over twenty-five, maybe not that old. She was blond, and thin to the point that you felt that light would shine through her. She had big, sensitive hands with long fingers, and a big, tragic mouth. Her hair was silver-white, but she was not an albino. She lay back in the chair, awake but apparently done in. The nurse was chafing her wrists.

"What's up?" I asked. "The kid faint?"

"Oh, no," Jedson assured me, turning around. "She's a white witch—works in a trance. She's a little tired now, that's all."

"What's her specialty?" I inquired.

"Whole garments."

"Huh?" I had a right to be surprised. It's one thing to create yard goods; another thing entirely to turn out a dress, or a suit, all finished and ready to wear. Jedson produced and merchandised a full line of garments in which magic was used throughout. They were mostly sportswear, novelty goods, ladies' fashions; and the like, in which style, rather than wearing qualities, was the determining factor. Usually they were marked "One Season Only," but they were perfectly satisfactory for that one season, being backed up by the consumers' groups.

But they were not turned out in one process. The yard goods involved were made first, usually by Welker. Dyes and designs were added separately. Jedson had some very good connections among the Little People, and could obtain shades and patterns from the Half World that were exclusive with him. He used both the old methods and magic in assembling garments, and employed some of the most talented artists in the business. Several of his dress designers free-lanced their magic in Hollywood under an arrangement with him. All he asked for was screen credit.

But to get back to the blond girl—

"That's what I said," Jedson answered, "whole garments, with good wearing qualities, too. There's no doubt that she is the real McCoy; she was under contract to a textile factory in Jersey City. But I'd give a thousand dollars to see her do that whole-garment stunt of hers just once. We haven't had any luck, though I've tried everything but red-hot pincers."

The kid looked alarmed at this, and the nurse looked indignant. Feldstein started to expostulate, but Jedson cut him short. "That was just a figure of speech; you know I don't hold with black magic. Look, darling," he went on, turning back to the girl, "do you feel like trying again?" She nodded, and he added, "All right—sleepy time now!"

And she tried again, going into her act with a minimum of groaning and spitting. The ectoplasm came out freely, and sure enough, it formed into a complete dress instead of yard goods. It was a neat little dinner frock, about a size sixteen, sky-blue in a watered silk. It had class in a refined way, and I knew that any jobber that saw it would be good for a sizable order.

Jedson grabbed it, cut off a swatch of cloth and applied his usual tests, finishing by taking the swatch out of the microscope and touching a match to it.

He swore. "Damn it," he said, "there's no doubt about it. It's not a new integration at all—she's just reanimated an old rag!"

"Come again," I said. "What of it?"

"Huh? Archie, you really ought to study up a bit. What she just did

isn't really creative magic at all. This dress"—he picked it up and shook it —"had a real existence some place at some time. She's gotten hold of a piece of it, a scrap or maybe just a button, and applied the laws of homeopathy and contiguity to produce a similacrum of it."

I UNDERSTOOD him, for I had used it in my own business. I had once had a section of bleachers, suitable for parades and athletic events, built on my own grounds by old methods, using skilled master mechanics and the best materials—no iron, of course. Then I cut it to pieces. Under the law of contiguity, each piece remained part of the structure it had once been in. Under the law of homeopathy, each piece was potentially the entire structure. I would contract to handle a Fourth of July crowd, or the spectators for a circus parade, and send out a couple of magicians armed with as many fragments of the original stands as we needed sections of bleachers. They would bind a spell to last twenty-four hours around each piece. That way the stands cleared themselves away automatically.

I had had only one mishap with it; an apprentice magician, who had the chore of being on hand as each section vanished and salvaging the animated fragment for further use, happened one day to pick up the wrong piece of wood from where one section had stood. The next time we used it, for the Shrine convention, we found we had thrown up a brand-new four-room bungalow at the corner of Fourteenth and Vine instead of a section of bleachers. It could have been embarrassing, but I stuck a sign on it,

MODEL HOME NOW ON DISPLAY

and ran up another section on the end.

An out-of-town concern tried to chisel me out of the business one season, but one of their units fell, either through faulty workmanship on the pattern or because of unskilled magic, and injured several people. Since then I've had the field pretty much to myself.

I could not understand Joe Jedson's objection to reanimation. "What difference does it make?" I persisted. "It's a dress, isn't it?"

"Sure, it's a dress, but it's not a new one. That style is registered somewhere and doesn't belong to me. And even if it were one of my numbers she had used, reanimation isn't what I'm after. I can make better merchandise cheaper without it—otherwise I'd be using it now."

The blond girl came to, saw the dress and said, "Oh, Mr. Jedson, did I do it?"

He explained what had happened. Her face fell, and the dress melted away at once. "Don't you feel bad about it, kid," he added, patting her on the shoulder, "you were tired. We'll try again tomorrow. I know you can do it when you're not nervous and overwrought."

She thanked him and left with the nurse. Feldstein was full of explanations, but Jedson told him to forget it, and to have them all back there at the

same time tomorrow. When we were alone I told him what had happened to me.

He listened in silence, his face serious, except when I told him how I had kidded my visitor into thinking I had second sight. That seemed to amuse him.

"You may wish that you really had it—second sight, I mean," he said at last, becoming solemn again. "This is an unpleasant prospect. Have you notified the Better Business Bureau?"

I told him I hadn't.

"Very well, then. I'll give them a ring—and the Chamber of Commerce, too. They probably can't help much, but they are entitled to notification, so they can be on the lookout for it."

I asked him if he thought I ought to notify the police. He shook his head. "Not just yet. Nothing illegal has been done, and, anyhow, all the chief could think of to cope with the situation would be to haul in all the licensed magicians in town and sweat them. That wouldn't do any good, and would just cause hard feeling to be directed against you by the legitimate members of the profession. There isn't a chance in ten that the sorcerers connected with this outfit are licensed to perform magic; they are almost sure to be clandestine. If the police knew about them, it's because they are protected. If they don't know about them, then they probably can't help you."

"What do you think I ought to do?"

"Nothing just yet. Go home and sleep on it. This Charlie may be playing a lone hand, making small-time shakedowns purely on bluff. I don't really think so; his type sounds like a mobster. But we need more data; we can't do anything until they expose their hand a little more."

We did not have long to wait. When I got down to my place of business the next morning I found a surprise waiting for me—several of them, all unpleasant.

It was as if it had been ransacked by burglars, set fire to, then gutted by a flood. I called up Jedson at once. He came right over. He didn't have anything to say at first, but went poking through the ruins, examining a number of things. He stopped at the point where the hardware storeroom had stood, reached down and gathered up a handful of the wet ashes and muck. "Notice anything?" he asked, working his fingers so that the debris sloughed off, and left in his hand some small metal objects, nails, screws, and the like.

"Nothing in particular. This is where the hardware bins were located; that's some of the stuff that didn't burn."

"Yes, I know," he said impatiently, "but don't you see anything else? Didn't you stock a lot of brass fittings?"

"Yes."

"Well, find one!"

"I see trouble coming but—maybe success too," Mrs. Jennings nodded to herself.

I poked around with my toe in a spot where there should have been a lot of brass hinges and drawer pulls mixed in with the ashes. I did not find anything but the nails that had held the bins together. I oriented myself by such landmarks as I could find, and tried again. There were plenty of nuts and bolts, casement hooks, and similar junk, but no brass.

Jedson watched me with a sardonic grin on his face.

"Well?" I said, somewhat annoyed at his manner.

"Don't you see?" he answered. "It's magic, all right. In this entire yard there is not one scrap of metal left, *except cold iron!*"

It was plain enough. I should have seen it myself.

He messed around a while longer. Presently we came across an odd thing. It was a slimy, wet track that meandered through my property, and disappeared down one of the drains. It looked as if a giant slug, about the size of an Austin car, had wandered through the place.

"Undine," Jedson announced, and wrinkled his nose at the smell. I once saw a movie, a Megapix super-production called the "Water King's Daughter." According to it, undines were luscious enough to have interested Earl Carroll—but if they left trails like that I wanted none of them.

He took out his handkerchief and spread it for a clean place to sit down on what had been sacks of cement—a fancy, quick-setting variety, with a trade name of Hydrolith. I had been getting eighty cents a sack for the stuff; now it was just so many big boulders.

He ticked the situation off on his fingers. "Archie, you've been kicked in the teeth by at least three of the four different types of elementals, earth, fire, and water. Maybe there was a sylph of the air in on it, too, but I can't prove it. First the gnomes came and cleaned out everything you had that came out of the ground, except cold iron. A salamander followed them and set fire to the place, burning everything that was burnable, and scorching and smoke-damaging the rest. Then the undine turned the placed into a damned swamp, ruining anything that wouldn't burn, like cement and lime. You're insured?"

"Naturally." But then I started to think. I carried the usual fire, theft, and flood insurance, but business-risk insurance comes pretty high; I was not covered against the business I would lose in the meantime, nor did I have any way to complete current contracts. It was going to cost me quite a lot to cover those contracts; if I let them slide it would ruin the good will of my business, and lay me open to suits for damage.

THE SITUATION was worse than I had thought, and looked worse still the more I thought about it. Naturally I could not accept any new business until the mess was cleaned up, the place rebuilt, and new stock put in. Luckily most of my papers were in a fireproof steel safe; but not all, by any means. There would be accounts receivable that I would never collect because I had nothing to show for them. I work on a slim margin of profit, with all of my capital at work. It began to look as if the firm of Archibald Fraser, Merchant and Contractor, would go into involuntary bankruptcy.

I explained the situation to Jedson.

"Don't get your wind up too fast," he reassured me. "What magic can do, magic can undo. What we need is the best wizard in town."

"Who's going to pay the fee?" I objected. "Those boys don't work for nickels, and I'm cleaned out."

"Take it easy, son," he advised, "the insurance outfit that carries your

risks is due to take a bigger loss than you are. If we can show them a way to save money on this, we can do business. Who represents them here?"

I told him—a firm of lawyers downtown in the Professional Building.

I got hold of my office girl and told her to telephone such of our customers as were due for deliveries that day. She was to stall where possible and pass on the business that could not wait to a firm that I had exchanged favors with in the past. I sent the rest of my help home—they had been standing around since eight o'clock, making useless remarks and getting in the way—and told them not to come back until I sent for them. Luckily it was Saturday; we had the best part of forty-eight hours to figure out some answer.

We flagged a magic carpet that was cruising past and headed for the Professional Building. I settled back and determined to enjoy the ride and forget my troubles. I like taxicabs—they give me a feeling of luxury—and I've liked them even better since they took the wheels off them. This happened to be one of the new Cadillacs with the teardrop shape and air cushions. We went scooting down the boulevard, silent as thought, not six inches off the ground.

Perhaps I should explain that we have a local city ordinance against apportation unless it conforms to traffic regulations—ground traffic, I mean, not air. That may surprise you, but it came about as a result of a mishap to a man in my own line of business. He had an order for eleven-odd tons of glass brick to be delivered to a restaurant being remodeled on the other side of town from his yard. He employed a magician with a common carrier's license to deliver for him. I don't know whether he was careless or just plain stupid, but he dropped those eleven tons of brick through the roof of the Prospect Boulevard Baptist Church. Anybody knows that magic won't work over consecrated ground; if he had consulted a map he would have seen that the straight-line route took his load over the church. Anyhow, the janitor was killed, and it might just as well have been the whole congregation. It caused such a commotion that apportation was limited to the streets, near the ground.

It's people like that who make it inconvenient for everybody else.

OUR MAN was in—Mr. Wiggin, of the firm of Wiggin, Snead, McClatchey & Wiggin. He had already heard about my "fire," but when Jedson explained his conviction that magic was at the bottom of it he balked. It was, he said, most irregular. Jedson was remarkably patient.

"Are you an expert in magic, Mr. Wiggin?" he asked.

"I have not specialized in thaumaturgic jurisprudence, if that is what you mean, sir."

"Well, I don't hold a license myself, but it has been my hobby for a good many years. I'm sure of what I say in this case; you can call in all the independent experts you wish—they'll confirm my opinion. Now suppose we stipulate, for the sake of argument, that this damage was caused by magic.

If that is true, there is a possibility that we may be able to save much of the loss. You have authority to settle claims, do you not?"

"Well, I think I may say yes to that—bearing in mind the legal restrictions and the terms of the contract." I don't believe he would have conceded that he had five fingers on his right hand without an auditor to back him up.

"Then it is your business to hold your company's losses down to a minimum. If I find a wizard who can undo a part, or all, of the damage, will you guarantee the fee, on behalf of your company, up to a reasonable amount, say twenty-five percent of the indemnity?"

He hemmed and hawed some more, and said he did not see how he could possibly do it, and that if the fire had been magic, then to restore by magic might be compounding a felony, as we could not be sure what the connections of the magicians involved might be in the Half World. Besides that, my claim had not been allowed as yet; I had failed to notify the company of my visitor of the day before, which possibly might prejudice my claim. In any case, it was a very serious precedent to set; he must consult the home office.

Jedson stood up. "I can see that we are simply wasting each other's time, Mr. Wiggin. Your contention about Mr. Fraser's possible responsibility is ridiculous, and you know it. There is no reason under the contract to notify you, and even if there were, he is within the twenty-four hours allowed for any notification. I think it best that we consult the home office ourselves." He reached for his hat.

Wiggin put up his hand. "Gentlemen, gentlemen, please! Let's not be hasty. Will Mr. Fraser agree to pay half of the fee?"

"No. Why should he? It's your loss, not his. *You* insured *him.*"

Wiggin tapped his teeth with his spectacles, then said, "We must make the fee contingent on results."

"Did you ever hear of anyone in his right mind dealing with a wizard on any other basis?"

Twenty minutes later we walked out with a document which enabled us to hire any witch or wizard to salvage my place of business on a contingent fee not to exceed twenty-five percent of the value reclaimed. "I thought you were going to throw up the whole matter," I told Jedson with a sigh of relief.

He grinned. "Not in the wide world, old son. He was simply trying to horse you into paying the cost of saving them some money. I just let him know that I knew."

IT TOOK some time to decide whom to consult. Jedson admitted frankly that he did not know of a man nearer than New York who could, with certainty, be trusted to do the job, and that was out of the question for the fee involved. We stopped in a bar, and he did some telephoning while I had a beer. Presently he came back and said, "I think I've got the man. I've never done business with him before, but he has the reputation and the training, and everybody I talked to seemed to think that he was the one to see."

"Who is it?" I wanted to know.

"Dr. Fortescue Biddle. He's just down the street—the Railway Exchange Building. Come on, we'll walk it."

I gulped down the rest of my beer and followed him.

Dr. Biddle's place was impressive. He had a corner suite on the fourteenth floor, and he had not spared expense in furnishing and decorating it. The style was modern; it had the austere elegance of a society physician's layout. There was a frieze around the wall of the signs of the zodiac done in intaglio glass, backed up by aluminum. That was the only decoration of any sort, the rest of the furnishing being very plain, but rich, with lots of plate glass and chromium.

We had to wait about thirty minutes in the outer office; I spent the time trying to estimate what I could have done the suite for, subletting what I had to and allowing ten percent. Then a really beautiful girl with a hushed voice ushered us in. We found ourselves in another smaller room, alone, and had to wait about ten minutes more. It was much like the waiting room, but had some glass bookcases and an old print of Aristotle. I looked at the bookcases with Jedson to kill time. They were filled with a lot of rare old classics on magic. Jedson had just pointed out the "Red Grimoire" when we heard a voice behind us.

"Amusing, aren't they? The ancients knew a surprising amount. Not scientific, of course, but remarkably clever—" The voice trailed off. We turned around; he introduced himself as Dr. Biddle.

He was a nice enough looking chap, really handsome in a spare, dignified fashion. He was about ten years older than I am—fortyish, maybe—with iron-gray hair at the temples and a small, stiff, British major's mustache. His clothes could have been out of the style pages of *Esquire*. There was no reason for me not to like him; his manners were pleasant enough. Maybe it was the supercilious twist to his expression.

He led us into his private office, sat us down, and offered us cigarettes before business was mentioned. He opened up with, "You're Jedson, of course. I suppose Mr. Ditworth sent you?"

I cocked an ear at him; the name was familiar. But Jedson simply answered, "Why, no. Why would you think that he had?"

Biddle hesitated for a moment, then said, half to himself, "That's strange. I was certain that I had heard him mention your name. Do either one of you," he added, "know Mr. Ditworth?"

We both nodded at once and surprised each other. Biddle seemed relieved and said, "No doubt that accounts for it. Still—I need some more information. Will you gentlemen excuse me while I call him?"

With that he vanished. I had never seen it done before. Jedson says there are two ways to do it, one is hallucination, the other is an actual exit through the Half World. Whichever way it's done, I think it's bad manners.

"About this chap Ditworth," I started to say to Jedson, "I had intended to ask you—"

"Let it wait," he cut me off, "there's not time now."

At this Biddle reappeared. "It's all right," he announced, speaking directly to me, "I can take your case. I suppose you've come about the trouble you had last night with your establishment?"

"Yes," I agreed. "How did you know?"

"Methods," he replied, with a deprecatory little smile. "My profession has its means— Now, about your problem. What is it you desire?"

I looked at Jedson; he explained what he thought had taken place and why he thought so. "Now I don't know whether you specialize in demonology or not," he concluded, "but it seems to me that it should be possible to evoke the powers responsible and force them to repair the damage. If you can do it, we are prepared to pay any reasonable fee."

Biddle smiled at this and glanced rather self-consciously at the assortment of diplomas hanging on the walls of his office. "I feel that there should be reason to reassure you," he purred. "Permit me to look over the ground —" And he was gone again.

I was beginning to be annoyed. It's all very well for a man to be good at his job, but there is no reason to make a side show out of it. But I didn't have time to grouse about it before he was back.

"Examination seems to confirm Mr. Jedson's opinion; there should be no unusual difficulties," he said. "Now as to the . . ah . . business arrangements—" He coughed politely and gave a little smile, as if he regretted having to deal with such vulgar matters.

Why do some people act as if making money offended their delicate minds? I am out for a legitimate profit, and not ashamed of it; the fact that people will pay money for my goods and services shows that my work is useful.

However, we made a deal without much trouble, then Biddle told us to meet him at my place in about fifteen minutes. Jedson and I left the building and flagged another cab. Once inside I asked him about Ditworth.

"Where'd you run across him?" I said.

"Came to me with a proposition."

"Hm-m-m—" This interested me; Ditworth had made me a proposition, too, and it had worried me. "What kind of a proposition?"

Jedson screwed up his forehead. "Well, that's hard to say—there was so much impressive sales talk along with it. Briefly, he said he was the local executive secretary of a nonprofit association which had as its purpose the improvement of standards of practicing magicians."

I nodded. It was the same story I had heard. "Go ahead."

"He dwelt on the inadequacy of the present licensing laws and pointed out that anyone could pass the examinations and hang out his shingle after a couple of weeks' study of a grimoire or black book without any fundamental knowledge of the Arcane laws at all. His organization would be a sort of bureau of standards to improve that, like the American Medical Association, or the National Conference of Universities and Colleges, or the Bar Associa-

tion. If I signed an agreement to patronize only those wizards who complied with their requirements, I could display their certificate of quality and put their seal of approval on my goods."

"Joe, I've heard the same story," I cut in, "and I didn't know quite what to make of it. It sounds all right, but I wouldn't want to stop doing business with men who have given me good value in the past, and I've no way of knowing that the association would approve them."

"What answer did you give him?"

"I stalled him a bit—told him that I couldn't sign anything as binding as that without discussing it with my attorney."

"Good boy! What did he say to that?"

"Well, he was really quite decent about it, and honestly seemed to want to be helpful. Said he thought I was wise and left me some stuff to look over. Do you know anything about him? Is he a wizard himself?"

"No, he's not. But I did find out some things about him. I knew vaguely that he was something in the Chamber of Commerce; what I didn't know is that he is on the board of a dozen or more blue-ribbon corporations. He's a lawyer, but not in practice—seems to spend all his time on his business interests."

"He sounds like a responsible man."

"I would say so. He seems to have had considerably less publicity than you would expect of a man of his business importance—probably a retiring sort. I ran across something that seemed to confirm that."

"What was it?" I asked.

"I looked up the incorporation papers for his association on file with the secretary of state. There were just three names, his own and two others. I found that both of the others were employed in his office—his secretary and his receptionist."

"Dummy set-up?"

"Undoubtedly. But there is nothing unusual about that. What interested me was this: I recognized one of the names."

"Huh?"

"You know, I'm on the auditing committee for the State committee of my party. I looked up the name of his secretary where I thought I had seen it. It was there, all right. His secretary, a chap by the name of Mathias, was down for a whopping big contribution to the governor's personal campaign fund."

We did not have any more time to talk just then, as the cab had pulled up at my place. Dr. Biddle was there before us and had already started his preparations. He had set up a little crystal pavilion, about ten feet square, to work in. The entire lot was blocked off from spectators on the front by an impalpable screen. Jedson warned me not to touch it.

I must say he worked without any of the usual hocus-pocus. He simply greeted us and entered the pavilion, where he sat down on a chair and

took a loose-leaf notebook from a pocket and commenced to read. Jedson says he used several pieces of paraphernalia, too. If so, I didn't see them. He worked with his clothes on.

Nothing happened for a few minutes. Gradually the walls of the shed became cloudy, so that everything inside was indistinct. It was about then that I became aware that there was something else in the pavilion besides Biddle. I could not see clearly what it was, and, to tell the truth, I didn't want to.

We could not hear anything that was said on the inside, but there was an argument going on—that was evident. Biddle stood up and began sawing the air with his hands. The thing threw back its head and laughed. At that Biddle threw a worried look in our direction and made a quick gesture with his right hand. The walls of the pavilion became opaque at once and we didn't see any more.

About five minutes later Biddle walked out of his workroom, which promptly disappeared behind him. He was a sight, his hair all mussed, sweat dripping from his face, and his collar wrinkled and limp. Worse than that, his aplomb was shaken.

"Well?" said Jedson.

"There is nothing to be done about it, Mr. Jedson, nothing at all."

"Nothing you can do about it, eh?"

He stiffened a bit at this. "Nothing *anyone* can do about it, gentlemen. Give it up. Forget about it. That is my advice."

Jedson said nothing, just looked at him speculatively. I kept quiet. Biddle was beginning to regain his self-possession. He straightened his hat, adjusted his necktie, and added, "I must return to my office. The survey fee will be five hundred dollars."

I was stonkered speechless at the bare-faced gall of the man, but Jedson acted as if he hadn't understood him. "No doubt it would be," he observed. "Too bad you didn't earn it. I'm sorry."

Biddle turned red, but preserved his urbanity. "Apparently you misunderstand me, sir. Under the agreement I have signed with Mr. Ditworth, thaumaturgists approved by the association are not permitted to offer free consultation. It lowers the standards of the profession. The fee I mentioned is the minimum fee for a magician of my classification, irrespective of services rendered."

"I see," Jedson answered calmly, "that's what it costs to step inside your office. But you didn't tell us that, so it doesn't apply. As for Mr. Ditworth, an agreement you sign with him does not bind us in any way. I advise you to return to your office and reread our contract. We owe you nothing."

I thought this time that Biddle would lose his temper, but all he answered was, "I shan't bandy words with you. You will hear from me later." He vanished then without so much as a by-your-leave.

I HEARD a snicker behind me and whirled around, ready to bite somebody's head off. I had had an upsetting day and didn't like to be laughed

at behind my back. There was a young chap there, about my own age. "Who are you, and what are you laughing at?" I snapped. "This is private property."

"Sorry, bud," he apologized with a disarming grin, "I wasn't laughing at you; I was laughing at the stuffed shirt. Your friend ticked him off properly."

"What are you doing here?" asked Jedson.

"Me? I guess I owe you an explanation. You see, I'm in the business myself—"

"Building?"

"No—magic. Here's my card." He handed it to Jedson, who glanced at it and passed it on to me. It read:

JACK BODIE
LICENSED MAGICIAN, 1ST CLASS
TELEPHONE CREST 3040

"You see, I heard a rumor in the Half World that one of the big shots was going to do a hard one here today. I just stopped in to see the fun. But how did you happen to pick a false alarm like Biddle? He's not up to this sort of thing."

Jedson reached over and took the card back. "Where did you take your training, Mr. Bodie?"

"Huh? I took my bachelor's degree at Harvard and finished up postgraduate at Chicago. But that's not important; my old man taught me everything I know, but he insisted on me going to college because he said a magician can't get a decent job these days without a degree. He was right."

"Do you think you could handle this job?" I asked.

"Probably not, but I wouldn't have made the fool of myself that Biddle did. Look here—you want to find somebody who *can* do this job?"

"Naturally," I said. "What do you think we're here for?"

"Well, you've gone about it the wrong way. Biddle's got a reputation simply because he's studied at Heidelberg and Vienna. That doesn't mean a thing. I'll bet it never occurred to you to look up an old-style witch for the job."

Jedson answered this one. "That's not quite true. I inquired around among my friends in the business, but didn't find anyone who was willing to take it on. But I'm willing to learn; whom do you suggest?"

"Do you know Mrs. Amanda Todd Jennings? Lives over in the old part of town; beyond the Congregational Cemetery."

"Jennings Jennings. Hm-m-m—no, can't say that I do. Wait a minute! Is she the old girl they call Granny Jennings? Wears Queen Mary hats and does her own marketing?"

"That's the one."

"But she's not a witch, she's a fortuneteller."

"That's what you think. She's not in regular commercial practice, it's

true, being ninety years older than Santy Claus, and feeble to boot. But she's got more magic in her little finger than you'll find in Solomon's book."

Jedson looked at me. I nodded, and he said:

"Do you think you could get her to attempt this case?"

"Well, I think she might do it, if she liked you."

"What arrangement do you want?" I asked. "Is ten percent satisfactory?"

He seemed rather put out at this. "Hell," he said, "I couldn't take a cut; she's been good to me all my life."

"If the tip is good, it's worth paying for," I insisted.

"Oh, forget it. Maybe you boys will have some work in my line some day—that's enough."

Pretty soon we were off again, without Bodie. He was tied up elsewhere, but promised to let Mrs. Jennings know that we were coming.

THE PLACE wasn't too hard to find. It was on an old street, arched over with elms, and the house was a one-story cottage, set well back. The veranda had a lot of that old scroll-saw gingerbread. The yard was not very well taken care of, but there was a lovely old climbing rose arched over the steps.

Jedson gave a twist to the handbell set in the door, and we waited for several minutes. I studied the colored-glass triangles set in the door's side panels and wondered if there was anyone left who could do that sort of work.

Then she let us in. She really was something incredible. She was so tiny that I found myself staring down at the crown of her head, and noting that the clean, pink scalp showed plainly through the scant, neat threads of hair. She couldn't have weighed seventy pounds dressed for the street, but stood proudly erect in lavender alpaca and white collar, and sized us up with live black eyes that would have fitted Catherine the Great, or Calamity Jane.

"Good morning to you," she said. "Come in."

She led us through a little hall, between beaded portières, said, "Scat, Seraphin!" to a cat on a chair, and sat us down in her parlor. The cat jumped down, walked away with an unhurried dignity, then sat down, tucked his tail neatly around his carefully placed feet, and stared at us with the same calm appraisal as his mistress.

"My boy Jack told me that you were coming," she began. "You are Mr. Fraser and you are Mr. Jedson," getting us sorted out correctly. It was not a question; it was a statement. "You want your futures read, I suppose. What method do you prefer—your palms, the stars, the sticks?"

I was about to correct her misapprehension when Jedson cut in ahead of me. "I think we'd best leave the method up to you, Mrs. Jennings."

"All right, we'll make it tea leaves, then. I'll put the kettle on; 'twon't take a minute." She bustled out. We could hear her in the kitchen, her light footsteps clicking on the linoleum, utensils scraping and clattering in a busy, pleasant disharmony.

When she returned I said, "I hope we aren't putting you out, Mrs. Jennings."

"Not a bit of it," she assured me. "I like a cup of tea in the morning; it does a body comfort. I just had to set a love philter off the fire—that's what took me so long."

"I'm sorry—"

" 'Twon't hurt it to wait."

"The Zekerboni formula?" Jedson inquired.

"My goodness gracious, no!" She was plainly upset by the suggestion. "I wouldn't kill all those harmless little creatures. Hares and swallows and doves—the very idea! I don't know what Pierre Mora was thinking about when he set that recipe down. I'd like to box his ears!

"No, I use Emula campana, orange, and ambergris. It's just as effective."

Jedson then asked if she had ever tried the juice of vervain. She looked closely into his face before replying, "You have the sight yourself, son. Am I not right?"

"A little, mother," he answered soberly, "a little, perhaps."

"It will grow. Mind how you use it. As for vervain, it is efficacious, as you know."

"Wouldn't it be simpler?"

"Of course it would. But if that easy a method became generally known, anyone and everyone would be making it and using it promiscuously—a bad thing. And witches would starve for want of clients—perhaps a good thing!" She flicked up one white eyebrow. "But if it is simplicity you want, there is no need to bother even with vervain. Here—" She reached out and touched me on the hand. "*'Bestarberto corrumpit viscera ejus virilis.'*" That is as near as I can reproduce her words. I may have misquoted it.

But I had no time to think about the formula she had pronounced. I was fully occupied with the startling thing that had come over me. I was in love, ecstatically, deliciously in love—with Granny Jennings! I don't mean that she suddenly looked like a beautiful young girl—she didn't. I still saw her as a little, old, shriveled-up woman with the face of a shrewd monkey, and ancient enough to be my great grandmother. It didn't matter. She was she—the Helen that all men desire, the object of romantic adoration.

She smiled into my face with a smile that was warm and full of affectionate understanding. Everything was all right, and I was perfectly happy. Then she said, "I would not mock you, boy," in a gentle voice, and touched my hand a second time while whispering something else.

At once it was all gone. She was just any nice old woman, the sort that would bake a cake for a grandson, or sit up with a sick neighbor. Nothing was changed, and the cat had not even blinked. The romantic fascination was an emotionless memory. But I was poorer for the difference.

THE KETTLE was boiling. She trotted out to attend to it, and returned shortly with a tray of tea things, a plate of seed cake, and thin slices of home-made bread spread with sweet butter.

When we had drunk a cup apiece with proper ceremony, she took Jedson's cup from him and examined the dregs. "Not much money there," she announced, "but you shan't need much; it's a fine full life." She touched the little pool of tea with the tip of her spoon and sent tiny ripples across it. "Yes, you have the sight, and the need for understanding that should go with it, but I find you in business instead of pursuing the great art, or even the lesser arts. Why is that?"

Jedson shrugged his shoulders and answered half apologetically, "There is work at hand that needs to be done. I do it."

She nodded. "That is well. There is understanding to be gained in any job, and you will gain it. There is no hurry—time is long. When your own work comes you will know it and be ready for it. Let me see your cup," she finished, turning to me.

I handed it to her. She studied it for a moment and said, "Well, you have not the clear sight such as your friend has, but you have the insight you need for your proper work. Any more would make you dissatisfied, for I see money here. You will make much money, Archie Fraser."

"Do you see any immediate setback in my business?" I said quickly.

"No. See for yourself." She motioned toward the cup. I leaned forward and stared at it. For a matter of seconds it seemed as if I looked through the surface of the dregs into a living scene beyond. I recognized it readily enough—it was my own place of business, even to the scars on the driveway gateposts where clumsy truck drivers had clipped the corner too closely.

But there was a new annex wing on the east side of the lot, and there were two beautiful new five-ton dump trucks drawn up in the yard with my name painted on them!

While I watched I saw myself step out of the office door and go walking down the street. I was wearing a new hat, but the suit was the one I was wearing in Mrs. Jennings' parlor, and so was the necktie—a plaid one from the tartan of my clan. I reached up and touched the original.

Mrs. Jennings said, "That will do for now," and I found myself staring at the bottom of the teacup. "You have seen," she went on, "your business need not worry you. As for love and marriage and children, sickness and health and death—let us look." She touched the surface of the dregs with a fingertip, the tea leaves moved gently. She regarded them closely for a moment. Her brow puckered, she started to speak, apparently thought better of it, and looked again. Finally she said,

"I do not fully understand this. It is not clear; my own shadow falls across it."

"Perhaps I can see," offered Jedson.

"Keep your peace!" She surprised me by speaking tartly, and placed

her hand over the cup. She turned back to me with compassion in her eyes. "It is not clear—you have two possible futures. Let your head rule your heart, and do not fret your soul with that which cannot be. Then you will marry, have children, and be content." With that she dismissed the matter, for she said at once to both of us, "You did not come here for divination; you came here for help of another sort." Again it was a statement, not a question.

"What sort of help, mother?" Jedson inquired.

"For this." She shoved my cup under his nose.

He looked at it and answered, "Yes, that is true. Is there help?" I looked into the cup, too, but saw nothing but tea leaves.

She answered, "I think so. You should not have employed Biddle, but the mistake was natural. Let us be going." Without further parley, she fetched her gloves and purse and coat, perched a ridiculous old hat on the top of her head, and bustled us out of the house. There was no discussion of terms—it didn't seem necessary.

WHEN we got back to the lot her workroom was already up. It was not anything fancy like Biddle's, but simply an old, square tent, like a gypsy's pitch, with a peaked top and made in several gaudy colors. She pushed aside the shawl that closed the door and invited us inside.

It was gloomy, but she took a big candle, lighted it and stuck it in the middle of the floor. By its light she inscribed five circles on the ground—first a large one, then a somewhat smaller one in front of it. Then she drew two others, one on each side the first and biggest circle. These were each big enough for a man to stand in, and she told us to do so. Finally she made one more circle off to one side and not more than a foot across.

I've never paid much attention to the methods of magicians, feeling about them the way Thomas Edison said he felt about mathematicians—when he wanted one he could hire one. But Mrs. Jennings was different. I wish I could understand the things she did—and why.

I know she drew a lot of cabalistic signs in the dirt within the circles. There were pentacles of various shapes, and some writing in what I judged to be Hebraic script, though Jedson says not. In particular there was, I remember, a sign like a long flat, Z, with a loop in it, woven in and out of a Maltese cross. Two more candles were lighted and placed on each side of this.

Then she jammed the dagger—arthame, Jedson called it—with which she had scribed the figures, into the ground at the top of the big circle so hard that it quivered. It continued to vibrate the whole time.

She placed a little folding stool in the center of the biggest circle, sat down on it, drew out a small book and commenced to read aloud in a voiceless whisper. I could not catch the words, and presume I was not meant to. This went on for some time. I glanced around and saw that the little circle off to one side was now occupied—by Seraphin, her cat. We had left him

"Take back that water. You know better than such behavior!" Mrs. Jennings snapped.

shut up in her house. He sat quietly, watching everything that took place with dignified interest.

Presently she shut the book and threw a pinch of powder into the flame

of the largest candle. It flared up and threw out a great puff of smoke. I am not quite sure what happened next, as the smoke smarted my eyes and made me blink, besides which, Jedson says I don't understand the purpose of fumigations at all. But I prefer to believe my eyes—either that cloud of smoke solidified into a body or it covered up an entrance, one or the other.

Standing in the middle of the circle in front of Mrs. Jennings was a short, powerful man about four feet high, or less. His shoulders were inches broader than mine, and his upper arms were thick as my thighs, knotted and bowed with muscle. He was dressed in a breechcloth, buskins, and a little hooded cap. His skin was hairless, but rough and earthy in texture. It was dull, lusterless. Everything about him was the same dull monotone, except his eyes, which shone green with repressed fury.

"Well!" said Mrs. Jennings crisply, "you've been long enough getting here! What have you to say for yourself?"

He answered sullenly, like an incorrigible boy caught but not repentant, in a language filled with rasping gutturals and sibilants. She listened a while, then cut him off.

"I don't care who told you to; you'll account to me! I require this harm repaired—in less time than it takes to tell it!"

He answered back angrily, and she dropped into his language, so that I could no longer follow the meaning. But it was clear that I was concerned in it; he threw me several dirty looks, and finally glared and spat in my direction.

Mrs. Jennings reached out and cracked him across the mouth with the back of her hand. He looked at her, killing in his eye, and said something.

"So?" she answered, put out a hand and grabbed him by the nape of the neck and swung him across her lap, face down. She snatched off a shoe and whacked him soundly with it. He let out one yelp, then kept silent, but jerked every time she struck him.

When she was through she stood up, spilling him to the ground. He picked himself up and hurriedly scrambled back into his own circle, where he stood, rubbing himself. Mrs. Jennings' eyes snapped and her voice crackled—there was nothing feeble about her now. "You gnomes are getting above yourselves," she scolded. "I never heard of such a thing! One more slip on your part and I'll fetch your people to see you spanked! Get along with you. Fetch your people for your task, and summon your brother and your brother's brother. By the great Tetragrammaton, get hence to the place appointed for you!"

He was gone.

Our next visitant came almost at once. It appeared first as a tiny spark hanging in the air. It grew into a living flame, a fireball, six inches or more across. It floated above the center of the second circle at the height of Mrs. Jennings' eyes. It danced and whirled and flamed, feeding on nothing.

Although I had never seen one, I knew it to be a salamander. It couldn't be anything else.

Mrs. Jennings watched it for a little time before speaking. I could see that she was enjoying its dance, as I was. It was a perfect and beautiful thing, with no fault in it. There was life in it, a singing joy, with no concern for—with no *relation* to—matters of right and wrong, or anything human. Its harmonies of color and curve were their own reason for being.

I suppose I'm pretty matter of fact. At least, I've always lived by the principle of doing my job and letting other things take care of themselves. But here was something that was worth while in itself, no matter what harm it did by my standards. Even the cat was purring.

Mrs. Jennings spoke to it in a clear, singing soprano that had no words to it. It answered back in pure liquid notes while the colors of its nucleus varied to suit the pitch. She turned to me and said, "It admits readily enough that it burned your place, but it was invited to do so and is not capable of appreciating your point of view. I dislike to compel it against its own nature. Is there any boon you can offer it?"

I thought for a moment. "Tell it that it makes me happy to watch it dance." She sang again to it. It spun and leaped, its flame tendrils whirling and floating in intricate, delightful patterns.

"That was good, but not sufficient. Can you think of anything else?"

I thought hard. "Tell it that if it likes, I will build a fireplace in my house where it will be welcome to live whenever it wishes."

She nodded approvingly and spoke to it again. I could almost understand its answer, but Mrs. Jennings translated. "It likes you. Will you let it approach you?"

"Can it hurt me?"

"Not here."

"All right, then."

She drew a T between our two circles. It followed closely behind the arthame like a cat at an opening door. Then it swirled about me and touched me lightly on my hands and face. Its touch did not burn, but tingled, rather, as if I felt its vibrations directly instead of sensing them as heat. It flowed over my face—I was plunged into a world of light, like the heart of the aurora borealis. I was afraid to breathe at first, but finally had to. No harm came to me, though the tingling was increased.

It's an odd thing, but I have not had a single cold since the salamander touched me. I used to sniffle all winter.

"Enough, enough," I heard Mrs. Jennings saying. The cloud of flame withdrew from me and returned to its circle. The musical discussion resumed, and they reached an agreement almost at once, for Mrs. Jennings nodded with satisfaction and said:

"Away with you then, fire child, and return when you are needed. Get hence—" She repeated the formula she had used on the gnome king.

THE UNDINE did not show up at once. Mrs. Jennings took out her book again and read from it in a monotonous whisper. I was beginning to be a bit sleepy—the tent was stuffy—when the cat commenced to spit. It was glaring at the center circle, claws out, back arched, and tail made big.

There was a shapeless something in that circle, a thing that dripped and spread its slimy moisture to the limit of the magic ring. It stank of fish and kelp and iodine, and shone with a wet phosphorescence.

"You're late," said Mrs. Jennings. "You got my message; why did you wait until I compelled you?"

It heaved with a sticky, sucking sound, but made no answer.

"Very well," she said firmly, "I shan't argue with you. You know what I want. You will do it!" She stood up and grasped the big center candle. Its flame flared up into a torch a yard high, and hot. She thrust it past her circle at the undine.

There was a hiss, as when water strikes hot iron, and a burbling scream. She jabbed at it again and again. At last she stopped and stared down at it, where it lay, quivering and drawing into itself. "That will do," she said. "Next time you will heed your mistress. Get hence!" It seemed to sink into the ground, leaving the dust dry behind it.

When it was gone she motioned for us to enter her circle, breaking our own with the dagger to permit us. Seraphin jumped lightly from his little circle to the big one and rubbed against her ankles, buzzing loudly. She repeated a meaningless series of syllables and clapped her hands smartly together.

There was a rushing and roaring. The sides of the tent billowed and cracked. I heard the chuckle of water and the crackle of flames, and, through that, the bustle of hurrying footsteps. She looked from side to side, and wherever her gaze fell the wall of the tent became transparent. I got hurried glimpses of unintelligible confusion.

Then it all ceased with a suddenness that was startling. The silence rang in our ears. The tent was gone; we stood in the loading yard outside my main warehouse.

It was there! It was back—back unharmed, without a trace of damage by fire or water. I broke away and ran out the main gate to where my business office had faced on the street. It was there, just as it used to be, the show windows shining in the sun, the Rotary Club emblem in one corner, and up on the roof my big two-way sign:

ARCHIBALD FRASER
BUILDING MATERIALS & GENERAL CONTRACTING

Jedson strolled out presently and touched me on the arm. "What are you bawling about, Archie?"

I stared at him. I wasn't aware that I had been.

We were doing business as usual on Monday morning. I thought everything was back to normal and that my troubles were over. I was too hasty in my optimism.

It was nothing you could put your finger on at first—just the ordinary vicissitudes of business, the little troubles that turn up in any line of work and slow up production. You expect them and charge them off to overhead. No one of them would be worth mentioning alone, except for one thing—they were happening too frequently.

You see, in any business run under a consistent management policy the losses due to unforeseen events should average out in the course of a year to about the same percentage of total cost. You allow for that in your estimates. But I started having so many small accidents and little difficulties that my margin of profit was eaten up.

One morning two of my trucks would not start. We could not find the trouble; I had to put them in the shop and rent a truck for the day to supplement my one remaining truck. We got our deliveries made, but I was out the truck rent, the repair bill, and four hours' overtime for drivers at time and a half. I had a net loss for the day.

The very next day I was just closing a deal with a man I had been trying to land for a couple of years. The deal was not important, but it would lead to a lot more business in the future, for he owned quite a bit of income property—some courts and an apartment house or two, several commercial corners, and held title or options on well-located lots all over town. He always had repair jobs to place and very frequently new building jobs. If I satisfied him he would be a steady customer with prompt payment, the kind you can afford to deal with on a small margin of profit.

We were standing in the showroom just outside my office, and talking, having about reached an agreement. There was a display of Sunprufe paint about three feet from us, the cans stacked in a neat pyramid. I swear that neither one of us touched it—but it came crashing to the floor, making a din that would sour milk.

That was nuisance enough, but not the payoff. The cover flew off one can and my prospect was drenched with red paint. He let out a yelp; I thought he was going to faint. I managed to get him back into my office, where I dabbed futilely at his suit with my handkerchief, while trying to calm him down.

He was in a state, both mentally and physically. "Fraser," he raged, "you've got to fire the clerk that knocked over those cans! Look at me! Eighty-five dollars' worth of suit ruined!"

"Let's not be hasty," I said soothingly, while holding my own temper in. I won't discharge a man to suit a customer, and don't like to be told to do so. "There wasn't anyone near those cans but ourselves."

"I suppose you think I did it?"

"Not at all. I know you didn't." I straightened up, wiped my hands and went over to my desk and got out my check book.

"Then you must have done it!"

"I don't think so,"-I answered patiently. "How much did you say your suit was worth?"

"Why?"

"I want to write you a check for the amount." I was quite willing to; I did not feel to blame, but it had happened through no fault of his in my shop.

"You can't get out of it as easily as that!" he answered unreasonably. "It isn't the cost of the suit I mind—" He jammed his hat on his head and stumped out. I knew his reputation; I'd seen the last of him.

That is the sort of thing I mean. Of course, it could have been an accident caused by clumsy stacking of the cans. But it might have been a poltergeist—accidents don't make themselves.

DITWORTH came to see me a day or so later about Biddle's phony bill. I had been subjected night and morning to this continuous stream of petty annoyances, and my temper was wearing thin. Just that day a gang of colored bricklayers had quit one of my jobs because some moron had scrawled some chalk marks on some of the bricks. "Voodoo marks," they said they were, and would not touch a brick. I was in no mood to be held up by Mr. Ditworth—I guess I was pretty short with him.

"Good day to you, Mr. Fraser," he said quite pleasantly, "can you spare me a few minutes?"

"Ten minutes, perhaps," I conceded, glancing at my wrist watch.

He settled his brief case against the legs of his chair and took out some papers. "I'll come to the point at once, then. It's about Dr. Biddle's claim against you. You and I are both fair men; I feel sure that we can come to some equitable agreement."

"Biddle has no claim against me."

He nodded. "I know just how you feel. Certainly there is nothing in the written contract obligating you to pay him. But there can be implied contracts just as binding as written contracts."

"I don't follow you. All my business is done in writing."

"Certainly," he agreed, "that's because you are a business man. In the professions the situation is somewhat different. If you go to a dental surgeon and ask him to pull an aching tooth, and he does, you are obligated to pay his fee, even though a fee has never been mentioned—"

"That's true," I interrupted, "but there is no parallel. Biddle didn't 'pull the tooth.'"

"In a way he did," Ditworth persisted, "the claim against you is for the survey, which was a service rendered you before this contract was written."

"But no mention was made of a service fee."

"That is where the implied obligation comes in, Mr. Fraser; you told Dr. Biddle that you had talked with me. He assumed quite correctly that I had previously explained to you the standard system of fees under the association—"

"But I did not join the association!"

"I know, I know. And I explained that to the other directors, but they insist that some sort of an adjustment must be made. I don't feel myself that you are fully to blame, but you will understand our position, I am sure. We are unable to accept you for membership in the association until this matter is adjusted—in fairness to Dr. Biddle."

"What makes you think I intend to join the association?"

He looked hurt. "I had not expected you to take that attitude, Mr. Fraser. The association needs men of your caliber. But in your own interest, you will necessarily join, for presently it will be very difficult to get efficient thaumaturgy except from members of the association. We want to help you. Please don't make it difficult for us."

I stood up. "I am afraid you had better sue me and let a court decide the matter, Mr. Ditworth. That seems to be the only satisfactory solution."

"I am sorry," he said, shaking his head. "It will prejudice your position when you come up for membership."

"Then it will just have to do so," I said shortly, and showed him out.

After he had gone I crabbed at my office girl for doing something I had told her to do the day before, and then had to apologize. I walked up and down a bit, stewing, although there was plenty of work I should have been doing. I was nervous; things had begun to get my goat—a dozen things that I haven't mentioned—and this last unreasonable demand from Ditworth seemed to be the last touch needed to upset me completely. Not that he could collect by suing me—that was preposterous—but it was an annoyance just the same. They say the Chinese have a torture that consists in letting one drop of water fall on the victim every few minutes. That's the way I felt.

Finally I called up Jedson and asked him to go to lunch with me.

I FELT better after lunch. Jedson soothed me down, as he always does, and I was able to forget and put in the past most of the things that had been annoying me simply by telling him about them. By the time I had had a second cup of coffee and smoked a cigarette I was almost fit for polite society.

We strolled back toward my shop, discussing his problems for a change. It seems the blond girl, the white witch from Jersey City, had finally managed to make her synthesis stunt work on footgear. But there was still a hitch; she had turned out over eight hundred left shoes—and no right ones.

We were just speculating as to the propable causes of such a contretemps when Jedson said, "Look, Archie. The candid camera fans are beginning to take an interest in you."

I looked. There was a chap standing at the curb directly across from my place of business and focusing a camera on the shop.

Then I looked again. "Joe," I snapped, "that's the bird I told you about, the one that came into my shop and started the trouble!"

"Are you sure?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"Positive." There was no doubt about it; he was only a short distance

away on the same side of the street that we were. It was the same racketeer who had tried to blackmail me into buying "protection," the same Mediterranean look to him, the same flashy clothes.

"We've got to grab him," whispered Jedson.

But I had already thought of that. I rushed at him and had grabbed him by his coat collar and the slack of his pants before he knew what was happening, and pushed him across the street ahead of me. We were nearly run down, but I was so mad I didn't care. Jedson came pounding after us.

The yard door of my office was open. I gave the mug a final heave that lifted him over the threshold and sent him sprawling on the floor. Jedson was right behind; I bolted the door as soon as we were both inside.

Jedson strode over to my desk, snatched open the middle drawer, and rummaged hurriedly through the pencils and stuff that accumulates in such places. He found what he wanted, a carpenter's blue pencil, and was back alongside our gangster before he had collected himself sufficiently to scramble to his feet. Jedson drew a circle around him on the floor, almost tripping over his own feet in his haste, and closed the circle with an intricate flourish.

Our unwilling guest screeched when he saw what Joe was doing, and tried to throw himself out of the circle before it could be finished. But Jedson had been too fast for him; the circle was closed and sealed—he bounced back from the boundary as if he had struck a glass wall, and stumbled again to his knees. He remained so for the time, and cursed steadily in a language that I judged to be Italian, although I think there were bad words in it from several other languages—certainly some English ones.

He was quite fluent.

Jedson pulled out a cigarette, lighted it and handed me one. "Let's sit down, Archie," he said, "and rest ourselves until our boy friend composes himself enough to talk business."

I DID SO, and we smoked for several minutes while the flood of invective continued. Presently Jedson cocked one eyebrow at the chap and said, "Aren't you beginning to repeat yourself?"

That checked him. He just sat and glared. "Well," Jedson continued, "haven't you anything to say for yourself?"

He growled under his breath and said, "I want to call my lawyer."

Jedson looked amused. "You don't understand the situation," he told him. "You're not under arrest, and we don't give a damn about your legal rights. We might just conjure up a hole and drop you in it, then let it relax." The guy paled a little under his swarthy skin. "Oh, yes," Jedson went on, "we are quite capable of doing that—or worse. You see, we don't like you.

"Of course," he added meditatively, "we might just turn you over to the police. I get a soft streak now and then." The chap looked sour. "You don't like that, either? Your fingerprints, maybe?" Jedson jumped to his

feet, and in two quick strides was standing over him, just outside the circle. "All right, then," he rapped, "answer up and make 'em good! Why were you taking photographs?"

The chap muttered something, his eyes lowered. Jedson brushed it aside. "Don't give me that stuff—we aren't children! Who told you to do it?"

He looked utterly panic-stricken at that and shut up completely.

"Very well," said Jedson, and turned to me. "Have you some wax, or modeling clay, or anything of the sort?"

"How would putty do?" I suggested.

"Just the thing." I slid out to the shed where we stow glaziers' supplies and came back with a five-pound can. Jedson pried it open and dug out a good big handful, then sat at my desk and worked the linseed oil into it until it was soft and workable. Our prisoner watched him with silent apprehension.

"There! That's about right," Jedson announced at length, and slapped the soft lump down on my blotter pad. He commenced to fashion it with his fingers, and it took shape slowly as a little doll about ten inches high. It did not look like much of anything or anybody—Jedson is no artist—but Jedson kept glancing from the figurine to the man in the circle and back again like a sculptor making a clay sketch directly from a model. You could see the chap's nervous terror increase by the minute.

"Now!" said Jedson, looking once more from the putty figure to his model. "It's just as ugly as you are. Why did you take that picture?"

He did not answer, but slunk farther back in the circle, his face nastier than ever.

"Talk!" snorted Jedson, and twisted a foot of the doll between a thumb and forefinger. The corresponding foot of our prisoner jerked out from under him and twisted violently. He fell heavily to the floor with a yelp of pain.

"You were going to cast a spell on this place, weren't you?"

He made his first coherent answer. "No, no, mister! Not me!"

"Not you? I see—you were just the errand boy. Who was to do the magic?"

"I don't know— Ow! Oh, God!" He grabbed at his left calf and nursed it. Jedson had jabbed a pen point into the leg of the doll. "I really *don't* know. Please, please!"

"Maybe you don't," Jedson grudged, "but at least you know who gives you your orders, and who some of the other members of your gang are. Start talking."

He rocked back and forth and covered his face with his hands. "I don't dare, mister," he groaned. "Please don't try to make me—" Jedson jabbed the doll with the pen again; he jumped and flinched, but this time he bore it silently with a look of gray determination.

"O. K.," said Jedson, "if you insist—" He took another drag from his cigarette, then brought the lighted end slowly toward the face of the doll. The man in the circle tried to shrink away from it, his hands up to protect

his face, but his efforts were futile. I could actually see the skin turn red and angry and the blisters blossom under his hide. It made me sick to watch it, and, while I didn't feel any real sympathy for the rat, I turned to Jedson and was about to ask him to stop when he took the cigarette away from the doll's face.

"Ready to talk?" he asked. The man nodded feebly, tears pouring down his scorched cheeks. He seemed about to collapse. "Here—don't faint," Jedson added, and slapped the face of the doll with a fingertip. I could hear the smack land and the chap's head rocked to the blow, but he seemed to take a brace from it.

"All right, Archie, you take it down." He turned back. "And you, my friend, talk—and talk lots. Tell us everything you know. If you find your memory failing you, stop to think how you would like my cigarette poked into dolly's eyes!"

And he did talk, babbled in fact. His spirit seemed to be completely broken, and he even seemed anxious to talk, stopping only occasionally to sniffle, or wipe at his eyes. Jedson questioned him to bring out points that were not clear.

THERE WERE five others in the gang that he knew about, and the set-up was roughly as we had guessed. It was their object to levy tribute on everyone connected with magic in this end of town, magicians and their customers alike. No, they did not have any real protection to offer except from their own mischief. Who was his boss? He told us. Was his boss the top man in the racket? No, but he did not know who the top man was. He was quite sure that his boss worked for someone else, but he did not know who. Even if we burned him again he could not tell us. But it was a big organization—he was sure of that. He himself had been brought from a city in the East to help organize here.

Was he a magician? So help him, no! Was his section boss one? No—he was sure; all that sort of thing was handled from higher up. That was all he knew, and could he go now? Jedson pressed him to remember other things; he added a number of details, most of them insignificant, but I took them all down. The last thing he said was that he thought both of us had been marked down for special attention because we had been successful in overcoming our first "lesson."

Finally Jedson let up on him. "I'm going to let you go now," he told him. "You'd better get out of town—don't let me see you hanging around again. But don't go too far; I may want you again. See this?" He held up the doll and squeezed it gently around the middle. The poor devil immediately commenced to gasp for breath as if he were being compressed in a strait jacket. "Don't forget that I've got you any time I want you." He let up on the pressure and his victim panted his relief. "I'm going to put your alter ego—doll to you!—where it will be safe, behind cold iron. When I want you, you'll feel a pain like that"—he nipped the doll's left shoulder with

his fingernails; the man yelped—"then you telephone me, no matter where you are.

Jedson pulled a penknife from his vest pocket and cut the circle three times, then joined the cuts. "Now get out!"

I thought he would bolt as soon as he was released, but he did not. He stepped hesitantly over the pencil mark, stood still for a moment and shivered. Then he stumbled toward the door. He turned just before he went through it and looked back at us, his eyes wide with fear. There was a look of appeal in them, too, and he seemed about to speak. Evidently he thought better of it, for he turned and went on out.

WHEN he was gone I looked back to Jedson. He had picked up my notes and was glancing through them. "I don't know," he mused, "whether it would be better to turn this stuff at once over to the Better Business Bureau and let them handle it, or whether to have a go at it ourselves. It's a temptation."

I was not interested just then. "Joe," I said, "I wish you hadn't burned him!"

"Eh? How's that?" He seemed surprised and stopped scratching his chin. "I didn't burn him."

"Don't quibble," I said, somewhat provoked. "You burned him through the doll, I mean—with magic."

"But I didn't, Archie. Really I didn't. He did that to himself—and it wasn't magic. I didn't do a thing!"

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Sympathetic magic isn't really magic at all, Archie. It's just an application if neuropsychology and colloidal chemistry. He did all that to himself, because he believed in it. I simply correctly judged his mentality."

The discussion was cut short; we heard an agony-loaded scream from somewhere outside the building. It broke off sharply, right at the top. "What was that?" I said, and gulped.

"I don't know," Jedson answered, and stepped to the door. He looked up and down before continuing. "It must be some distance away. I didn't see anything." He came back into the room. "As I was saying, it would be a lot of fun to—"

This time it was a police siren. We heard it from far away, but it came rapidly nearer, turned a corner, and yowled down our street. We looked at each other. "Maybe we'd better go see," we both said, right together, then laughed nervously.

It was our gangster acquaintance. We found him half a block down the street, in the middle of a little group of curious passers-by who were being crowded back by cops from the squad car at the curb.

He was quite dead.

He lay on his back, but there was no repose in the position. He had been raked from forehead to waist, laid open to the bone in three roughly

As Jedson brought the end of the cigarette near the doll's face, the gangster screamed—

parallel scratches, as if slashed by the talons of a hawk, or an eagle. But the bird that made those wounds must have been the size of a five-ton truck.

There was nothing to tell from his expression—his face and throat were covered by, and his mouth choked with, a yellowish substance shot with purple. It was about the consistency of thin cottage cheese, but it had the most sickening smell I have ever run up against.

I turned to Jedson, who was not looking any too happy himself, and said, "Let's get back to the office."

We did.

We decided at last to do a little investigating on our own before taking up what we had learned with the Better Business Bureau, or with the police. It was just as well that we did; none of the gang whose names we had obtained was any longer to be found in the haunts which we had listed. There was plenty of evidence that such persons had existed and that they had lived at the addresses which Jedson had sweated out of their pal. But all of them, without exception, had done a bunk for parts unknown the same afternoon that their accomplice had been killed.

We did not go to the police, for we had no wish to be associated with an especially unsavory sudden death. Instead, Jedson made a cautious verbal report to a friend of his at the Better Business Bureau, who passed it on secondhand to the head of the racket squad and elsewhere, as his judgment indicated.

I did not have any more trouble with my business for some time thereafter, and I was working very hard, trying to show a profit for the quarter in spite of setbacks. I had put the whole matter fairly well out of my mind, except that I dropped over to call on Mrs. Jennings occasionally and that I had used her young friend Jack Bodie once or twice in my business, when I needed commercial magic. He was a good workman—no monkey business and value received.

I was beginning to think I had the world on a leash when I ran into another series of accidents. This time they did not threaten my business; they threatened *me*—and I'm just as fond of my neck as the next man.

In the house where I live the water-heater is installed in the kitchen. It is a storage type, with a pilot light and a thermostatically controlled main flame. Right alongside it is a range with a pilot light.

I woke up in the middle of the night and decided that I wanted a drink of water. When I stepped into the kitchen—don't ask me why I did not look for a drink in the bathroom, because I don't know—I was almost gagged by the smell of gas. I ran over and threw the window wide open, then ducked back out the door and ran into the living room, where I opened a big window to create a cross draft.

At that point there was a dull *whoosh* and a *boom*, and I found myself sitting on the living-room rug.

I was not hurt, and there was no damage in the kitchen except for a

few broken dishes. Opening the windows had released the explosion, cushioned the effect. Natural gas is not an explosive unless it is confined. What had happened was clear enough when I looked over the scene. The pilot light on the heater had gone out; when the water in the tank cooled, the thermostat turned on the main gas jet, which continued indefinitely to pour gas into the room. When an explosive mixture was reached, the pilot light of the stove was waiting, ready to set it off.

Apparently I wandered in at the zero hour.

I fussed at my landlord about it and finally we made a dicker whereby he installed one of the electrical water heaters which I supplied at cost and donated the labor.

No magic about the whole incident, eh? That is what I thought—now I am not so sure.

THE NEXT THING that threw a scare into me occurred the same week, with no apparent connection. I keep dry mix—sand, rock, gravel—in the usual big bins set up high on concrete stanchions so that the trucks can drive under the hoppers for loading. One evening after closing time I was walking past the bins when I noticed that someone had left a scoop shovel in the driveway pit under the hoppers.

I have had trouble with my men leaving tools out at night; I decided to put this one in my car and confront someone with it in the morning. I was about to jump down into the pit when I heard my name called.

"Archibald!" it said—and it sounded remarkably like Mrs. Jennings' voice. Naturally I looked around. There was no one there. I turned back to the pit in time to hear a cracking sound and to see that scoop covered with twenty tons of medium gravel.

A man can live through being buried alive, but not when he has to wait overnight for someone to miss him and dig him out. A crystallized steel forging was the prima-facie cause of the mishap. I suppose that will do.

There was never anything to point to but natural causes, yet for about two weeks I stepped on banana peels both figuratively and literally. I saved my skin with a spot of fast footwork at least a dozen times. I finally broke down and told Mrs. Jennings about it.

"Don't worry too much about it, Archie," she reassured me. "It is not too easy to kill a man with magic unless he himself is involved with magic and sensitive to it."

"Might as well kill a man as scare him to death!" I protested.

She smiled that incredible smile of hers and said, "I don't think you have been really frightened, lad—at least you have not shown it."

I caught an implication in that remark and taxed her with it. "You've been watching me and pulling me out of jams! Haven't you?"

She smiled more broadly and replied, "That's my business, Archie. It is not well for the young to depend on the old for help. Now get along with you—I want to give this matter more thought."

A couple of days later a note came in the mail addressed to me in a spidery, Spencerian script. The penmanship had the dignified flavor of the last century, and was the least bit shaky, as if the writer were unwell, or very elderly. I had never seen the hand before, but guessed who it was before I opened it. It read:

MY DEAR ARCHIBALD: This is to introduce my esteemed friend, Dr. Royce Worthington. You will find him staying at the Belmont Hotel; he is expecting to hear from you. Dr. Worthington is exceptionally well qualified to deal with the matters that have been troubling you these few weeks past. You may repose every confidence in his judgment, especially where unusual measures are required.

Please to include your friend, Mr. Jedson, in this introduction, if you wish.

I am, sir,

Very sincerely yours,

AMANDA TODD JENNINGS.

I rang up Joe Jedson and read the letter to him. He said that he would be over at once, and for me to telephone Worthington.

"Is Dr. Worthington there?" I asked as soon as the room clerk had put me through.

"Speaking," answered a cultured British voice with a hint of Oxford in it.

"This is Archibald Fraser, doctor. Mrs. Jennings has written to me, suggesting that I look you up."

"Oh, yes!" he replied, his voice warming considerably. "I shall be delighted. When will be a convenient time?"

"If you are free, I could come right over."

"Let me see—" He paused about long enough to consult a watch. "I have occasion to go to your side of the city. Might I stop by your office in thirty minutes, or a little later?"

"That will be fine, doctor, if it does not disscommode you—"

"Not at all. I will be there."

JEDSON ARRIVED a little later and asked me at once about Dr. Worthington. "I haven't seen him yet," I said, "but he sounds like something pretty swank in the way of an English-university don. He'll be here shortly."

My office girl brought in his card a half-hour later. I got up to greet him and saw a tall, heavy-set man with a face of great dignity and evident intelligence. He was dressed in rather conservative, expensively tailored clothes and carried gloves, stick, and a large brief case. But he was black as draftsman's ink!

I tried not to show surprise. I hope I did not, for I have an utter horror of showing that kind of rudeness. There was no reason why the man should not be a Negro—I simply had not been expecting it.

Jedson helped me out. I don't believe he would show surprise if a fried egg winked at him. He took over the conversation for the first couple of minutes, after I introduced him; we all found chairs, settled down, and spent

a few minutes in the polite, meaningless exchanges that people make when they are sizing up strangers.

Worthington opened the matter. "Mrs. Jennings gave me to believe," he observed, "that there was some fashion in which I might possibly be of assistance to one, or both of you—"

I told him that there certainly was, and sketched out the background for him from the time the racketeer contact man first showed up at my shop. He asked a few questions, and Jedson helped me out with some details. I got the impression that Mrs. Jennings had already told him most of it, and that he was simply checking.

"Very well," he said at last, his voice a deep, mellow rumble that seemed to echo in his big chest before it reached the air, "I am reasonably sure that we will find a way to cope with your problems—but first I must make a few examinations before we can complete the diagnosis." He leaned over and commenced to unstrap his brief case.

"Uh . . . doctor," I suggested, "hadn't we better complete our arrangements before you start to work?"

"Arrangements?" He looked momentarily puzzled, then smiled broadly. "Oh, you mean payment. My dear sir, it is a privilege to do a favor for Mrs. Jennings."

"But . . . but . . . see here, doctor, I'd feel better about it. I assure you I am quite in the habit of paying for magic—"

He held up a hand. "It is not possible, my young friend, for two reasons: In the first place, I am not licensed to practice in your State. In the second place, I am not a magician."

I SUPPOSE I looked as inane as I sounded. "Huh? What's that? Oh! Excuse me, doctor, I guess I just naturally assumed that since Mrs. Jennings had sent you, and your title, and all—"

He continued to smile, but it was a smile of understanding rather than amusement at my discomfiture. "That is not surprising; even some of your fellow citizens of my blood make that mistake. No, my degree is an honorary doctor of laws of Cambridge University. My proper pursuit is anthropology, which I sometimes teach at the University of South Africa. But anthropology has some odd bypaths; I am here to exercise one of them."

"Well, then, may I ask—"

"Certainly, sir. My avocation, freely translated from its quite unpronounceable proper name, is 'witch smeller.'"

I was still puzzled. "But doesn't that involve magic?"

"Yes and no. In Africa the hierarchy and the categories in these matters are not the same as in this continent. I am not considered a wizard, or witch doctor, but rather as an antidote for such."

Something had been worrying Jedson. "Doctor," he inquired, "you were not originally from South Africa?"

Worthington gestured toward his own face—I suppose that Jedson read

something there that was beyond my knowledge. "As you have discerned. No, I was born in a bush tribe south of the Lower Congo."

"From there, eh? That's interesting. By any chance, are you nganga?"

"Of the Ndembo—but not by chance." He turned to me and explained courteously. "Your friend asked me if I was a member of an occult fraternity which extends throughout Africa, but which has the bulk of its members in my native territory. Initiates are called nganga."

Jedson persisted in his interest. "It seems likely to me, doctor, that Worthington is a name of convenience—that you have another name."

"You are again right—naturally. My tribal name—do you wish to know it?"

"If you will."

"It is"—I cannot reproduce the odd clicking, lip-smacking noise he uttered—"or it is just as proper to state it in English, as the meaning is what counts—Man-Who-Asks-Inconvenient-Questions. Prosecuting attorney is another reasonably idiomatic, though not quite liberal, translation, because of the tribal function implied. But it seems to me," he went on, with a smile of unmalicious humor, "that the name fits you even better than it does me. May I give it to you?"

Here occurred something that I did not understand, except that it must have its basis in some African custom completely foreign to our habits of thought. I was prepared to laugh at the doctor's witticism, and I am sure he meant it to be funny, but Jedson answered him quite seriously:

"I am deeply honored to accept."

"It is you who honor me, brother."

FROM THEN on, throughout our association with him, Dr. Worthington invariably addressed Jedson by the African name he had formerly claimed as his own, and Jedson called him "brother" or "Royce." Their whole attitude toward each other underwent a change, as if the offer and acceptance of a name had in fact made them brothers, with all of the privileges and obligations of the relationship.

"I have not left you without a name," Jedson added. "You had a third name, your real name?"

"Yes, of course," Worthington acknowledged, "a name which we need not mention."

"Naturally," Jedson agreed, "a name which must not be mentioned. Shall we get to work, then?"

"Yes, let us do so." He turned to me. "Have you some place here where I may make my preparations? It need not be large—"

"Will this do?" I offered, getting up and opening the door of a cloak and washroom which adjoins my office.

"Nicely, thank you," he said, and took himself and his brief case inside, closing the door after him. He was gone ten minutes at least.

Jedson did not seem disposed to talk, except to suggest that I caution

my girl not to disturb us, nor let anyone enter from the outer office. We sat and waited.

Then he came out of the cloakroom, and I got my second big surprise of the day. The urbane Dr. Worthington was gone. In his place was an African personage who stood over six feet tall in his bare black feet, and whose enormous, arched chest was overlaid with thick, sleek muscles of polished obsidian. He was dressed in a loin skin of leopard, and carried certain accouterments, notably a pouch which hung at his waist.

But it was not his equipment that held me, nor yet the John Henry-like proportions of that warrior frame, but the face. The eyebrows were painted white and the hairline had been outlined in the same color, but I hardly noticed these things. It was the expression—humorless, implacable, filled with a dignity and strength which must be felt to be appreciated. The eyes gave a conviction of wisdom beyond my comprehension, and there was no pity in them—only a stern justice that I myself would not care to face.

We white men in this country are inclined to underestimate the black man—I know I do—because we see him out of his cultural matrix. Those we know have had their own culture wrenched from them some generations back and a servile pseudo-culture imposed on them by force. We forget that the black man has a culture of his own, older than ours and more solidly grounded, based on character and the power of the mind rather than the cheap, ephemeral tricks of mechanical gadgets. But it is a stern, fierce culture with no sentimental concern for the weak and the unfit, and it never quite dies out.

I STOOD UP in involuntary respect when Dr. Worthington entered the room.

"Let us begin," he said in a perfectly ordinary voice, and squatted down, his great toes spread and grasping the floor. He took several things out of the pouch—a dog's tail, a wrinkled black object the size of a man's fist, and other things hard to identify. He fastened the tail to his waist so that it hung down behind. Then he picked up one of the things that he had taken from the pouch—a small item, wrapped and tied in red silk—and said to me, "Will you open your safe?"

I did so, and stepped back out of his way. He thrust the little bundle inside, clanged the door shut and spun the knob. I looked inquiringly at Jedson.

"He has his . well soul in that package, and has sealed it away behind cold iron. He does not know what dangers he may encounter," Jedson whispered. "See?" I looked and saw him pass his thumb carefully all around the crack that joined the safe to its door.

He returned to the middle of the floor and picked up the wrinkled black object and rubbed it affectionately. "This is my mother's father," he announced. I looked at it more closely and saw that it was a mummified human head with a few wisps of hair still clinging to the edge of the scalp! "He is

very wise," he continued in a matter-of-fact voice, "and I shall need his advice. Grandfather, this is your new son and his friend." Jedson bowed and I found myself doing so. "They want our help."

He started to converse with the head in his own tongue, listening from time to time, and then answering. Once they seemed to get into an argument, but the matter must have been settled satisfactorily, for the palaver soon quieted down. After a few minutes he ceased talking and glanced around the room. His eye lit on a bracket shelf intended for an electric fan, which was quite high off the floor.

"There!" he said. "That will do nicely. Grandfather needs a high place from which to watch." He went over and placed the little head on the bracket so that it faced out into the room.

When he returned to his place in the middle of the room he dropped to all fours and commenced to cast around with his nose like a hunting dog trying to pick up a scent. He ran back and forth, snuffling and whining, exactly like a pack leader worried by mixed trails. The tail fastened to his waist stood up tensely and quivered, as if still part of a live animal. His gait and his mannerisms mimicked those of a hound so convincingly that I blinked my eyes when he sat down suddenly and announced:

"I've never seen a place more loaded with traces of magic. I can pick out Mrs. Jennings' very strongly and your own business magic. But after I eliminate them the air is still crowded. You must have had everything but a rain dance and a sabbat going on around you!"

He dropped back into his character of a dog without giving us a chance to reply, and started making his casts a little wider. Presently he appeared to come to some sort of an impasse, for he settled back, looked at the head and whined vigorously. Then he waited.

The reply must have satisfied him; he gave a sharp bark and dragged open the bottom drawer of a file cabinet, working clumsily, as if with paws instead of hands. He dug into the back of the drawer eagerly and hauled out something which he popped into his pouch.

After that he trotted very cheerfully around the place for a short time, until he had poked his nose into every odd corner. When he had finished he returned to the middle of the floor, squatted down again, and said, "That takes care of everything here for the present. This place is the center of their attack, so grandfather has agreed to stay and watch here until I can bind a cord around your place to keep witches out."

I was a little perturbed at that. I was sure the head would scare my office girl half out of her wits if she saw it. I said so as diplomatically as possible.

"How about that?" he asked the head, then turned back to me after a moment of listening. "Grandfather says it's all right; he won't let anyone see him he has not been introduced to." It turned out that he was perfectly correct—nobody noticed it, not even the scrubwoman.

"Now then," he went on, "I want to check over my brother's place of

business at the earliest opportunity, and I want to smell out both of your homes and insulate them against mischief. In the meantime, here is some advice for each of you to follow carefully: Don't let anything of yourself fall into the hands of strangers—nail parings, spittle, hair cuttings—guard it all. Destroy them by fire, or engulf them in running water. It will make our task much simpler. I am finished." He got up and strode back into the cloakroom.

Ten minutes later the dignified and scholarly Dr. Worthington was smoking a cigarette with us. I had to look up at his grandfather's head to convince myself that a jungle lord had actually been there.

BUSINESS was picking up at that time, and I had no more screwy accidents after Dr. Worthington cleaned out the place. I could see a net profit for the quarter and was beginning to feel cheerful again. I received a letter from Ditworth, dunning me about Biddle's phony claim, but I filed it in the wastebasket without giving it a thought.

One day shortly before noon, Feldstein, the magicians' agent, dropped into my place. "Hi, Zack!" I said cheerfully when he walked in. "How's business?"

"Mr. Fraser, of all questions, that you should ask me that one," he said, shaking his head mournfully from side to side. "Business—it is terrible."

"Why do you say that?" I asked. "I see lots of signs of activity around—"

"Appearances are deceiving," he insisted, "especially in my business. Tell me—have you heard of a concern calling themselves 'Magic, Incorporated'?"

"That's funny," I told him. "I just did, for the first time. This just came in the mail"—and I held up an unopened letter. It had a return address on it of "Magic, Incorporated, Suite 700, Commonwealth Building."

Feldstein took it gingerly, as if he thought it might poison him, and inspected it. "That's the parties I mean," he confirmed. "The goniffs!"

"Why, what's the trouble, Zack?"

"They don't want that a man should make an honest living— Mr. Fraser," he interrupted himself anxiously, "you wouldn't quit doing business with an old friend who had always done right by you?"

"Of course not, Zack, but what's it all about?"

"Read it. Go ahead." He shoved the letter back at me.

I opened it. The paper was a fine quality, watermarked, rag bond, and the letterhead was chaste and dignified. I glanced over the stuffed-shirt committee and was quite agreeably impressed by the caliber of men they had as officers and directors—big men, all of them, except for a couple of names among the executives that I did not recognize.

The letter itself amounted to an advertising prospectus. It was a new idea; I suppose you could call it a holding company for magicians. They offered to provide any and all kinds of magical service. The customer could

dispense with shopping around; he could call this one number, state his needs, and the company would supply the service and bill him. It seemed fair enough—no more than an incorporated agency.

I glanced on down. "—fully guaranteed service, backed by the entire assets of a responsible company—" "—surprisingly low standard fees, made possible by elimination of fee splitting with agents and by centralized administration—" "The gratifying response from the members of the great profession enables us to predict that Magic, Incorporated, will be the natural source to turn to for competent thaumaturgy in any line—probably the only source of truly first-rate magic—"

I put it down. "Why worry about it, Zack?. It's just another agency. As for their claims—I've heard you say that you have all the best ones in your stable. You didn't expect to be believed, did you?"

"No," he conceded, "not quite, maybe—among us two. But this is really serious, Mr. Fraser. They've hired away most of my really first-class operators with salaries and bonuses I can't match. And now they offer magic to the public at a price that undersells those I've got left. It's ruin, I'm telling you."

It was hard lines. Feldstein was a nice little guy that grabbed the nickels the way he did for a wife and five beady-eyed kids, to whom he was devoted. But I felt he was exaggerating; he has a tendency to dramatize himself. "Don't worry," I said, "I'll stick by you, and so, I imagine, will most of your customers. This outfit can't get all the magicians together; they're too independent. Look at Ditworth—he tried with his association. What did it get him?"

"Ditworth—aagh!" He started to spit, then remembered he was in my office. "This *is* Ditworth—this company!"

"How do you figure that? He's not on the letterhead."

"I found out. You think he wasn't successful because you held out. They held a meeting of the directors of the association—that's Ditworth and his two secretaries—and voted the contracts over to the new corporation. Then Ditworth resigns and his stooge steps in as front for the nonprofit association, and Ditworth runs both companies. You will see! If we could open the books of Magic, Incorporated, you will find he has voting control. I know it!"

"It seems unlikely," I said slowly.

"You'll see! Ditworth with all his fancy talk about a no-profit service for the improvement of standards shouldn't be any place around Magic, Incorporated, should he, now? You call up and ask for him—"

I did not answer, but dialed the number on the letterhead. When a girl's voice said, "Good morning—Magic, Incorporated," I said:

"Mr. Ditworth, please."

She hesitated quite a long time, then said, "Who is calling, please?"

That made it my turn to hesitate. I did not want to talk to Ditworth; I wanted to establish a fact. I finally said, "Tell him it's Dr. Biddle's office."

Whereupon she answered readily enough, but with a trace of puzzlement in her voice, "But Mr. Ditworth is not in the suite just now; he was due in Dr. Biddle's office half an hour ago. Didn't he arrive?"

"Oh," I said, "perhaps he's with the chief and I didn't see him come in. Sorry." And I rang off.

"I guess you are right," I admitted, turning back to Feldstein.

He was too worried to be pleased about it. "Look," he said, "I want you should have lunch with me and talk about it some more."

"I was just on my way to the Chamber of Commerce luncheon. Come along and we'll talk on the way. You're a member."

"All right," he agreed dolefully. "Maybe I can't afford it much longer."

We were a little late and had to take separate seats. The treasurer stuck the kitty under my nose and "twisted her tail." He wanted a ten-cent fine from me for being late. The kitty is an ordinary frying pan with a mechanical bicycle bell mounted on the handle. We pay all fines on the spot, which is good for the treasury and a source of innocent amusement. The treasurer shoves the pan at you and rings the bell until you pay up.

I hastily produced a dime and dropped it in. Steve Harris, who has an automobile agency, yelled, "That's right! Make the Scotchman pay up!" and threw a roll at me.

"Ten cents for disorder," announced our chairman, Norman Somers, without looking up. The treasurer put the bee on Steve. I heard the coin clink into the pan, then the bell was rung again.

"What's the trouble?" asked Somers.

"More of Steve's tricks," the treasurer reported in a tired voice. "Fairy gold, this time." Steve had chucked in a synthetic coin that some friendly magician had made up for him. Naturally, when it struck cold iron it melted away.

"Two bits more for counterfeiting," decided Somers, "then handcuff him and ring up the United States attorney." Steve is quite a card, but he does not put much over on Norman.

"Can't I finish my lunch first?" asked Steve, in tones that simply dripped with fake self-pity. Norman ignored him and he paid up.

"Steve, better have fun while you can," commented Al Donahue, who runs a string of drive-in restaurants. "When you sign up with Magic, Incorporated, you will have to cut out playing tricks with magic." I sat up and listened.

"Who said I was going to sign up with them?"

"Huh? Of course you are. It's the logical thing to do. Don't be a dope."

"Why should I?"

"Why should you? Why, it's the direction of progress, man. Take my

case: I put out the fanciest line of vanishing desserts of any eating place in town. You can eat three of them if you like, and not feel full and not gain an ounce. Now I've been losing money on them, but kept them for advertising because of the way they bring in the women's trade. Now Magic, Incorporated, comes along and offers me the same thing at a price I can make money with them, too. Naturally, I signed up."

"You would. Suppose they raise the prices on you after they have hired, or driven out of business, every competent wizard in town?"

Donahue laughed in a superior, irritating way. "I've got a contract."

"So? How long does it run? And did you read the cancellation clause?"

I knew what he was talking about, even if Donahue didn't; I had been through it. About five years ago, a Portland cement firm came into town and began buying up the little dealers and cutting prices against the rest. They ran sixty-cent cement down to thirty-five cents a sack and broke their competitors. Then they jacked it back up by easy stages until cement sold for a dollar twenty-five. The boys took a whipping before they knew what had happened to them.

We all had to shut up about then, for the guest speaker, old B. J. Timken, the big subdivider, started in. He spoke on "Co-operation and Service." Although he is not exactly a scintillating speaker, he had some very inspiring things to say about how businessmen could serve the community and help each other; I enjoyed it.

After the clapping died down, Norman Somers thanked B. J. and said, "That's all for today, gentlemen, unless there is some new business to bring before the house—"

JEDSON got up. I was sitting with my back to him, and had not known he was present. "I think there is, Mr. Chairman—a very important matter. I ask the indulgence of the chair for a few minutes of informal discussion."

Somers answered, "Certainly, Joe, if you've got something important."

"Thanks. I think it is. This is really an extension of the discussion between Al Donahue and Steve Harris earlier in the meeting. I think there has been a major change in business conditions going on in this city right under our noses and we haven't noticed it, except where it directly affected our own businesses. I refer to the trade in commercial magic. How many of you use magic in your business? Put your hands up." All the hands went up, except a couple of lawyers. Personally, I had always figured they were magicians themselves.

"O. K.," Jedson went on, "put them down. We knew that; we all use it. I use it for textiles. Hank Manning here uses nothing else for cleaning and pressing, and probably uses it for some of his dye jobs, too. Wally Haight's Maple Shop uses it to assemble and finish fine furniture. Stan Robertson will tell you that Le Bon Marché's slick window displays are thrown together with spells as well as two thirds of the merchandise in his store, especially in the kids' toy department. Now I want to ask you an-

other question: In how many cases is the percentage of your cost charged to magic greater than your margin of profit? Think about it for a moment before answering." He paused, then said: "All right—put up your hands."

Nearly as many hands went up as before.

"That's the point of the whole matter. We've got to have magic to stay in business. If anyone gets a strangle hold on magic in this community, we are all at his mercy. We would have to pay any prices that are handed us, charge the prices we are told to, and take what profits we are allowed to—or go out of business!"

The chairman interrupted him. "Just a minute, Joe. Granting that what you say is true—it is, of course—do you have any reason to feel that we are confronted with any particular emergency in the matter?"

"Yes, I do have." Joe's voice was low and very serious. "Little reasons, most of them, but they add up to convince me that someone is engaged in a conspiracy in restraint of trade." Jedson ran rapidly over the history of Ditworth's attempt to organize magicians and their clients into an association, presumably to raise the standards of the profession, and how alongside the nonprofit association had suddenly appeared a capital corporation which was already in a fair way to becoming a monopoly.

"Wait a second, Joe," put in Ed Parmelee, who has a produce jobbing business. "I think that association is a fine idea. I was threatened by some rat who tried to intimidate me into letting him pick my magicians. I took it up with the association and they took care of it; I didn't have any more trouble. I think an organization which can clamp down on racketeers is a pretty fine thing."

"You had to sign with the association to get their help, didn't you?"

"Why, yes, but that's entirely reasonable—"

"Isn't it possible that your gangster got what he wanted when you signed up?"

"Why that seems pretty farfetched."

"I don't say," persisted Joe, "that is the explanation, but it is a distinct possibility. It would not be the first time that monopolists used goon squads with their left hands to get by coercion what their right hands could not touch. I wonder whether any of the rest of you have had similar experiences?"

It developed that several of them had had. I could see them beginning to think.

One of the lawyers present formally asked a question through the chairman. "Mr. Chairman, passing for the moment from the association to Magic, Incorporated, is this corporation anything more than a union of magicians? If so, they have a legal right to organize."

Norman turned to Jedson. "Will you answer that, Joe?"

"Certainly. It is not a union at all. It is a parallel to a situation in

which all the carpenters in town are employees of one contractor; you deal with that contractor or you don't build."

"Then it's a simple case of monopoly—if it is a monopoly. This State has a Little Sherman Act; you can prosecute."

"I think you will find that it is a monopoly. Have any of you noticed that there are no magicians present at today's meeting?"

We all looked around. It was perfectly true. "I think you can expect," he added, "to find magicians represented hereafter in this chamber by some executive of Magic, Incorporated. With respect to the possibility of prosecution"—he hauled a folded newspaper out of his hip pocket—"have any of you paid any attention to the governor's call for a special session of the legislature?"

Al Donahue remarked superciliously that he was too busy making a living to waste any time on the political game. It was a deliberate dig at Joe, for everybody knew that he was a committeeman, and spent quite a lot of time on civic affairs. The dig must have gotten under Joe's skin, for he said pityingly, "Al, it's a damn good thing for you that some of us are willing to spend a little time on government, or you would wake up some morning to find they had stolen the sidewalks in front of your house."

The chairman rapped for order; Joe apologized. Donahue muttered something under his breath about the whole political business being dirty, and that anyone associated with it was bound to turn crooked. I reached out for an ash tray and knocked over a glass of water which spilled into Donahue's lap. It diverted his mind. Joe went on talking.

"Of course, we knew a special session was likely for several reasons, but when they published the agenda of the call last night, I found tucked away toward the bottom an item 'Regulation of Thaumaturgy.' I couldn't believe that there was any reason to deal with such a matter in a special session unless something was up. I got on the phone last night and called a friend of mine at the capitol, a fellow committeewoman. She did not know anything about it, but she called me back later. Here's what she found out: The item was stuck into the agenda at the request of some of the governor's campaign backers; he has no special interest in it himself. Nobody seems to know what it is all about, but one bill on the subject has already been dropped in the hopper—" There was an interruption; somebody wanted to know what the bill said.

"I'm trying to tell you," Joe said patiently. "The bill was submitted by title alone; we won't be likely to know its contents until it is taken up in committee. But here is the title: 'A Bill to Establish Professional Standards for Thaumaturgists, Regulate the Practice of the Thaumaturgic Profession, Provide for the Appointment of a Commission to Examine, License, and Administer—' and so on. As you can see, it isn't even a proper title; it's just an omnibus onto which they can hang any sort of legislation regarding magic, including an abridgment of antimonopoly regulation if they choose."

There was a short silence after this. I think all of us were trying to

make up our minds on a subject that we were not really conversant with—politics. Presently someone spoke up and said, "What do you think we ought to do about it?"

"Well," he answered, "we at least ought to have our own representative at the capitol to protect us in the clinches. Besides that, we at least ought to be prepared to submit our own bill, if this one has any tricks in it, and bargain for the best compromise we can get. We should at least get an implementing amendment out of it that would put some real teeth into the State antitrust act, at least insofar as magic is concerned." He grinned. "That's four 'at leasts,' I think."

"Why can't the State Chamber of Commerce handle it for us? They maintain a legislative bureau."

"Sure, they have a lobby, but you know perfectly well that the State chamber doesn't see eye to eye with us little businessmen. We can't depend on them; we may actually be fighting them."

THERE WAS quite a powwow after Joe sat down. Everybody had his own ideas about what to do, and tried to express them all at once. It became evident that there was no general agreement, whereupon Somers adjourned the meeting with the announcement that those interested in sending a representative to the capitol should stay. A few of the diehards like Donahue left, and the rest of us reconvened with Somers again in the chair. It was suggested that Jedson would have to be the one to go, and he agreed to do it.

Feldstein got up and made a speech with tears in his eyes. He wandered and did not seem to be getting any place, but finally he managed to get out that Jedson would need a good big war chest to do any good at the capitol, and also should be compensated for his expenses and loss of time. At that he astounded us by pulling out a roll of bills, counting out one thousand dollars, and shoving it over in front of Joe.

That display of sincerity caused him to be made finance chairman by general consent, and the subscriptions came in very nicely. I held down my natural impulses and matched Feldstein's donation, though I did wish he had not been quite so impetuous. I think Feldstein had a slight change of heart a little later, for he cautioned Joe to be economical and not to waste a lot of money buying liquor for "those schlemiels at the capitol."

Jedson shook his head at this, and said that while he intended to pay his own expenses himself, he would have to have a free hand in the spending of the fund, particularly with respect to entertainment. He said the time was too short to depend on sweet reasonableness and disinterested patriotism alone—that some of those lunkheads had no more opinions than a weathervane and would vote to favor the last man they had had a drink with.

Somebody made a shocked remark about bribery. "I don't intend to bribe anyone," Jedson answered with a brittle note in his voice. "If it came to swapping bribes, we're licked to start with. I am just praying that there

are still enough unpledged votes up there to make a little persuasive talking and judicious browbeating worth while."

He got his own way, but I could not help agreeing privately with Feldstein. And I made a resolution to pay a little more attention to politics thereafter; I did not even know the name of my own legislator—how did I know whether or not he was a high-caliber man or just a cheap opportunist?

And that is how Jedson, Bodie and myself happened to find ourselves on the train, headed for the capitol.

Bodie went along because Jedson wanted a first-rate magician to play bird dog for him. He said he did not know what might turn up. I went along because I wanted to. I had never been to the capitol before, except to pass through, and was interested to see how this lawmaking business is done.

Jedson went straight to the secretary of state's office to register as a lobbyist, while Jack and I took our baggage to the Hotel Constitution and booked some rooms. Mrs. Logan, Joe's friend the committeewoman, showed up before he got back.

Jedson had told us a great deal about Sally Logan during the train trip. He seemed to feel that she combined the shrewdness of Machiavelli with the great-hearted integrity of Oliver Wendell Holmes. I was surprised at his enthusiasm, for I have often heard him grouse about women in politics.

"But you don't understand, Archie," he elaborated. "Sally isn't a woman politician, she is simply a politician, and asks no special consideration because of her sex. She can stand up and trade punches with the toughest manipulators on the Hill. What I said about women politicians is perfectly true, as a statistical generalization, but it proves nothing about any particular woman.

"It's like this: Most women in the United States have a short-sighted, peasant individualism resulting from the male-created romantic tradition of the last century. They were told that they were superior creatures, a little nearer to the angels than their menfolks. They were not encouraged to think, nor to assume social responsibility. It takes a strong mind to break out of that sort of conditioning, and most minds simply aren't up to it, male or female.

"Consequently, women as electors are usually suckers for romantic nonsense. They can be flattered into misusing their ballot even more easily than men. In politics their self-righteous feeling of virtue, combined with their essentially peasant training, resulted in them introducing a type of cut-rate, petty chiseling that should make Boss Tweed spin in his coffin.

"But Sally's not like that. She's got a tough mind which could reject the hokum."

"You're not in love with her, are you?"

"Who, me? Sally's happily married and has two of the best kids I know."

"What does her husband do?"

"Lawyer. One of the governor's supporters. Sally got started in politics through pinch-hitting for her husband one campaign."

"What is her official position up here?"

"None. Right hand for the governor. That's her strength. Sally has never held a patronage job, nor been paid for her services."

After this build-up I was anxious to meet this paragon. When she called I spoke to her over the house phone and was about to say that I would come down to the lobby when she announced that she was coming up, and hung up. I was a little startled at the informality, not yet realizing that politicians did not regard hotel rooms as bedrooms, but as business offices.

When I let her in she said, "You're Archie Fraser, aren't you? I'm Sally Logan. Where's Joe?"

"He'll be back soon. Won't you sit down and wait?"

"Thanks." She plopped herself into a chair, took off her hat and shook out her hair. I looked her over.

I had unconsciously expected something pretty formidable in the way of a mannish matron. What I saw was a young, plump, cheerful-looking blonde, with an untidy mass of yellow hair and frank blue eyes. She was entirely feminine, not over thirty at the outside, and there was something about her that was tremendously reassuring.

She made me think of county fairs and well water and sugar cookies.

"I'm afraid this is going to be a tough proposition," she began at once. "I didn't think there was much interest in the matter, and I still don't think so, but just the same, someone has a solid bloc lined up for Assembly Bill 22—that's the bill I wired Joe about. What do you boys plan to do; make a straight fight to kill it or submit a substitute bill?"

"Jedson drew up a fair-practices act with the aid of some of our Half World friends and a couple of lawyers. Would you like to see it?"

"Please. I stopped by the State Printing Office and got a few copies of the bill you are against—AB 22. We'll swap."

I was trying to translate the foreign language lawyers use when they write statutes when Jedson came in. He patted Sally's cheek without speaking, and she reached up and squeezed his hand and went on with her reading. He commenced reading over my shoulder. I gave up and let him have it. It made a set of building specifications look simple.

Sally asked, "What do you think of it, Joe?"

"Worse than I expected," he replied. "Take Paragraph 7—"

"I haven't read it yet."

"So? Well, in the first place it recognizes the association as a semi-public body like the Bar Association or the Community Chest, and permits it to initiate actions before the commission. That means that every magician had better by a damn sight belong to Ditworth's association and be careful not to offend it."

We tore over to the legislature — they'd tricked us!

"But how can that be legal?" I asked. "It sounds unconstitutional to me—a private association like that—"

"Plenty of precedent, son. Corporations to promote world's fairs, for example. They're recognized, and even voted tax money. As for unconstitutionality, you 'u'd have to prove that the law was not equal in application—which it isn't!—but awfully hard to prove."

"But anyhow, a witch gets a hearing before the commission?"

"Sure, but there is the rub. The commission has very broad powers, almost unlimited powers over everything connected with magic. The bill is filled with phrases like 'reasonable and proper,' which means the sky's the limit with nothing but the good sense and decency of the commissioners to restrain them. That's my objection to commissions in government—the law can never be equal in application under them. They have delegated legislative powers, and the law is what they say it is. You might as well face a drumhead court-martial.

"There are nine commissioners provided for in this case, six of which must be licensed magicians, first class. I don't suppose it is necessary to point out that a few ill-advised appointments to the original commission will turn it into a tight little self-perpetuating oligarchy—through its power to license."

SALLY AND JOE were going over to see a legislator whom they thought might sponsor our bill, so they dropped me off at the capitol. I wanted to listen to some of the debate.

It gave me a warm feeling to climb up the big, wide steps of the State house. The old, ugly mass of masonry seemed to represent something tough in the character of the American people, the determination of free men to manage their own affairs. Our own current problem seemed a little smaller, not quite so overpoweringly important—still worth working on, but simply one example in a long history of the general problem of self-government.

I noticed something else as I was approaching the great bronze doors; the contractor for the outer construction of the building must have made his pile—the mix for the mortar was not richer than one to six!

I decided on the assembly rather than the senate because Sally said they generally put on a livelier show. When I entered the hall they were discussing a resolution to investigate the tarring and feathering of three agricultural-worker organizers up near the town of Six Points the previous month. Sally had remarked that it was on the calendar for the day, but that it would not take long because the proponents of the resolution did not really want it. However, the Central Labor Council had passed a resolution demanding it, and the labor-supported members were stuck with it.

The reason why they could only go through the motions of asking for an investigation was that the organizers were not really human beings at all, but mandrakes, a fact that the State council had not been aware of when they asked for an investigation. Since the making of mandrakes is the blackest kind of black magic, and highly illegal, they needed some way to drop it qui-

etly. The use of mandrakes has always been opposed by organized labor because it displaces real men—men with families to support. For the same reasons, they oppose synthetic facsimiles and homunculi. But it is well known that the unions are not above using mandrakes, or mandragores, as well as facsimiles, when it suits their purpose, such as for pickets, pressure groups, and the like. I suppose they feel justified in fighting fire with fire. Homunculi they can't use on account of their size, being too small to be passed off as men.

If Sally had not primed me, I would not have understood what took place. Each of the labor members got up and demanded a resolution to investigate in forthright terms. When they were all through, someone proposed that the matter be tabled until the grand jury of the county concerned held its next meeting. This motion was voted on without debate and without a roll call; although practically no members were present except those who had spoken in favor of the original resolution, the motion passed easily.

THERE WAS the usual crop of oil-industry bills on the agenda, such as you read about in the newspapers every time the legislature is in session. One of them was the next item on the day's calendar—a bill which proposed that the governor negotiate a treaty with the gnomes under which the gnomes would aid the petroleum engineers in prospecting, and in addition would advise humans in drilling methods so as to maintain the natural gas pressure underground needed to raise the oil to the surface. I think that is the idea, but I am no petrologist.

The proponent spoke first. "Mr. Speaker," he said, "I ask for a 'Yes' vote on this bill, AB 79. Its purpose is quite simple and the advantages obvious. A very large part of the overhead cost of recovering crude oil from the ground lies in the uncertainties of prospecting and drilling. With the aid of the Little People, this item can be reduced to an estimated seven percent of its present dollar cost and the price of gasoline and other petroleum products to the people can be greatly lessened.

"The matter of underground gas pressure is a little more technical, but suffice it to say that it takes, in round numbers, a thousand cubic feet of natural gas to raise one barrel of oil to the surface. If we can get intelligent supervision of drilling operations far underground, where no human being can go, we can make the most economical use of this precious gas pressure.

"The only rational objection to this bill lies in whether or not we can deal with the gnomes on favorable terms. I believe that we can, for the administration has some excellent connections in the Half World. The gnomes are willing to negotiate in order to put a stop to the present condition of anarchy in which human engineers drill blindly, sometimes wrecking their homes and not infrequently violating their sacred places. They not unreasonably claim everything under the surface as their kingdom, but are willing to make any reasonable concession to abate what is to them an intolerable nuisance.

"If this treaty works out well, as it will, we can expect to arrange other treaties which will enable us to exploit all of the metal and mineral resources of this State under conditions highly advantageous to us, and not hurtful to the gnomes. Imagine, if you please, having a gnome with his X-ray eyes peer into a mountainside and locate a rich vein of gold for you!"

It seemed very reasonable, except that, having once seen the king of the gnomes, I could not trust him very far, unless Mrs. Jennings did the negotiating.

As soon as the proponent sat down, another member jumped up and just as vigorously denounced it. He was older than most of the members, and I judged him to be a country lawyer. His accent placed him in the northern part of the State, well away from the oil country. "Mr. Speaker," he bellowed, "I ask for a vote of 'No'! Who would dream that an American legislature would stoop to such degrading nonsense? Have any of you ever seen a gnome? Have you any reason to believe that gnomes exist? This is just a cheap piece of political chicanery to do the public out of its proper share of the natural reasources of our great State—"

He was interrupted by a question. "Does the honorable member from Lincoln County mean to imply that he has no belief in magic? Perhaps he does not believe in the radio, or the telephone, either?"

"Not at all. If the chair will permit, I will state my position so clearly that even my respected colleague on the other side of the house will understand it. There are certain remarkable developments in human knowledge in general use which are commonly referred to by the laity as magic. These principles are well understood and are taught, I am happy to say, in our great publicly owned institutions for higher learning. I have every respect for the legitimate practitioners thereof. But, as I understand it, although I am not myself a practitioner of the great science, there is nothing in it that requires a belief in the Little People.

"But let us stipulate, for the sake of argument, that the Little People do exist. Is that any reason to pay them blackmail? Should the citizens of this commonwealth pay cumshaw to the denizens of the underworld—" He waited for his pun to be appreciated. It wasn't. "—for that which is legally and rightfully ours? If this ridiculous principle is pushed to its logical consequence, the farmers and dairymen I am proud to number among my constituents will next be required to pay toll to the elves before they can milk their cows!"

Someone slid into the seat beside me. I glanced around, saw that it was Jedson, and questioned him with my eyes. "Nothing doing now," he whispered. "We've got some time to kill, and might as well do it here"—and he turned to the debate.

Somebody had gotten up to reply to the old duck with the Daniel Webster complex. "Mr. Speaker, if the honored member is quite through with his speech—I did not quite catch what office he is running for!—I would like

to invite the attention of this body to the precedented standing in jurisprudence of elementals of every nature, not only in Mosaic law, Roman law, the English common law, but also in the appellate court of our neighboring State to the south. I am confident that anyone possessing even an elementary knowledge of the law will recognize the case I have in mind without citation, but for the benefit of—"

"Mr. Speaker! I move to amend by striking out the last word."

"A stratagem to gain the floor," Joe whispered.

"Is it the purpose of the honorable member who preceded me to imply—"

It went on and on. I turned to Jedson and asked, "I can't figure out this chap that is speaking—a while ago he was hollering about cows—what's he afraid of? Religious prejudices?"

"Partly that—he's from a very conservative district. But he's lined up with the independent oil men. They don't want the State setting the terms; they think they can do better dealing with the gnomes directly."

"But what interest has he got in oil? There's no oil in his district."

"No, but there is outdoor advertising. The same holding company that controls the so-called independent oil men holds a voting trust in the Countryside Advertising Corp. And that can be awfully important to him around election time."

The speaker looked our way, and an assistant sergeant at arms threaded his way toward us. We shut up. Someone moved the order of the day, and the oil bill was put aside for one of the magic bills that had already come out of committee. This was a bill to outlaw every sort of magic, witchcraft, thaumaturgy.

No one spoke for it but the proponent, who launched into a diatribe that was more scholarly than logical. He quoted extensively from Blackstone's Commentaries and the records of the Massachusetts trials, and finished up with his head thrown back, one finger waving wildly to heaven and shouting, " 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!' "

No one bothered to speak against it; it was voted on immediately without roll call, and, to my complete bewilderment, passed without a single nay! I turned to Jedson and found him smiling at the expression on my face.

"It doesnt mean a thing, Archie," he said quietly.

"Huh?"

"He's a party wheel horse who had to introduce that bill to please a certain bloc of his constituents."

"You mean he doesn't believe in the bill himself?"

"Oh, no—he believes in it, all right, but he also knows it is hopeless. It has evidently been agreed to let him pass it over here in the assembly this session so that he would have something to take home to his people. Now it will go to the senate committee and die there—nobody will ever hear of it again."

I guess my voice carries too well, for my reply got us a really dirty look from the speaker. We got up hastily and left.

ONCE OUTSIDE, I asked Joe what had happened that he was back so soon. "He would not touch it," he told me. "Said that he couldn't afford to antagonize the association."

"Does that finish us?"

"Not at all. Sally and I are going to see another member right after lunch—he's tied up in a committee meeting at the moment."

We stopped in a restaurant where Jedson had arranged to meet Sally Logan. Jedson ordered lunch, and I had a couple of cans of devitalized beer, insisting on them bringing it to the booth in the unopened containers. I don't like to get even a little bit tipsy, although I like to drink. On another occasion I had paid for wizard-processed liquor and had received intoxicating liquor instead. Hence the unopened containers.

I sat there, staring into my glass and thinking about what I had heard that morning, especially about the bill to outlaw all magic. The more I thought about it the better the notion seemed. The country had gotten along all right in the old days before magic had become popular and commercially widespread. It was unquestionably a headache in many ways, even leaving out our present troubles with racketeers and monopolists. Finally I expressed my opinion to Jedson.

But he disagreed. According to him, prohibition never does work in any field. He said that anything which can be supplied and which people want, will be supplied—law or no law. To prohibit magic would simply be to turn over the field to the crooks and the black magicians.

"I see the drawbacks of magic as well as you do," he went on, "but it is like firearms. Certainly guns made it possible for almost anyone to commit murder and get away with it. But once they were invented the damage was done. All you can do is to try to cope with it. Things like the Sullivan Act—they didn't keep the crooks from carrying guns and using them; they simply took guns out of the hands of honest people.

"It's the same with magic. If you prohibit it, you take from decent people the enormous boons to be derived from a knowledge of the great Arcane Laws, while the nasty, harmful secrets hidden away in black grimoires and red grimoires will still be bootlegged to anyone who will pay the price and has no respect for law.

"Personally, I don't believe there was any less black magic practiced between, say, 1750 and 1950 than there is now, or was before then. Take a look at Pennsylvania and the hex country. Take a look at the deep South. But since that time we have begun to have the advantages of white magic, too."

SALLY came in, spotted us, and slid into one side of the booth. "My," she said with a sigh of relaxation, "I've just fought my way across the lobby of the Constitution. The 'third house' is certainly out in full force this trip. I've never seen 'em so thick, especially the women."

"Third house?" I said.

"She means lobbyists, Archie," Jedson explained. "Yes, I noticed them. I'd like to make a small bet that two thirds of them are synthetic."

"I *thought* I didn't recognize many of them," Sally commented. "Are you sure, Joe?"

"Not entirely. But Bodie agrees with me. He says that the women are almost all mandrakes, or androids of some sort. Real women are never quite so perfectly beautiful—nor so tractable. I've got him checking on them now."

"In what way?"

"He says he can spot the work of most of the magicians capable of that high-powered stuff. If possible, we want to prove that all these androids were made by Magic, Incorporated—though I'm not sure just what use we can make of the fact.

"Bodie has even located some zombies," he added.

"Not really!" exclaimed Sally. She wrinkled her nose and looked disgusted. "Some people have odd tastes."

They started discussing aspects of politics that I know nothing about, while Sally put away a very sizable lunch topped off by a fudge ice cream cake slice. But I noticed that she ordered from the left-hand side of the menu—all vanishing items, like the alcohol in my beer.

I found out more about the situation as they talked. When a bill is submitted to the legislature, it is first referred to a committee for hearings. Ditworth's bill, AB 22, had been referred to the Committee on Professional Standards. Over in the senate, an identical bill had turned up and had been referred by the lieutenant governor, who presides in the senate, to the Committee on Industrial Practices.

Our immediate object was to find a sponsor for our bill; if possible, one from each house, and preferably sponsors who were members, in their respective houses, of the committees concerned. All of this needed to be done before Ditworth's bills came up for hearing.

I went with them to see their second-choice sponsor for the assembly. He was not on the Professional Standards Committee, but he was on the Ways and Means Committee, which meant that he carried a lot of weight in any committee.

He was a pleasant chap named Spence—Luther B. Spence—and I could see that he was quite anxious to please Sally—for past favors, I suppose. But they had no more luck with him than with their first-choice man. He said that he did not have time to fight for our bill, as the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee was sick and he was chairman pro tem.

Sally put it to him flatly. "Look here, Luther—when you have needed a hand in the past, you've gotten it from me. I hate to remind a man of obligations, but you will recall that matter of the vacancy last year on the Fish and Game Commission. Now I want action on this matter, and not excuses!"

Spence was plainly embarrassed. "Now, Sally, please don't feel like

that—you're getting your feathers up over nothing. You know I'll always do anything I can for you; but you don't really need this, and it would necessitate me neglecting things that I can't afford to neglect."

"What do you mean, I don't need it?"

"I mean you should not worry about AB 22—it's a cinch bill."

Jedson explained that term to me later. A cinch bill, he said, was a bill introduced for tactical reasons. The sponsors never intended to try to get it enacted into law, but simply used it as a bargaining point. It's like an "asking price" in a business deal.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Why, yes, I think so. The word has been passed around that there is another bill coming up that won't have the bugs in it that this bill has."

After we left Spence's office, Jedson said, "Sally, I hope Spence is right, but I don't trust Ditworth's intentions. He's out to get a strangle hold on the industry. I know it!"

"Luther usually has the correct information, Joe."

"Yes, that is no doubt true, but this is a little out of his line. Anyhow, thanks, kid. You did your best."

"Call on me if there is anything else, Joe. And come out to dinner before you go; you haven't seen Bill or the kids yet."

"I won't forget."

JEDSON FINALLY gave up trying to submit our bill as impractical, and concentrated on the committees handling Ditworth's bills. I did not see much of him. He would go out at four in the afternoon to a cocktail party and get back to the hotel at three in the morning, bleary-eyed, with progress to report.

He woke me up the fourth night and announced jubilantly, "It's in the bag, Archie!"

"You killed those bills?"

"Not quite—I couldn't manage that. But they will be reported out of committee so amended that we won't care if they do pass. Furthermore, the amendments are different in each committee."

"Well, what of that?"

"That means that even if they do pass their respective houses they will have to go to conference committee to have their differences ironed out, then back for final passage in each house. The chances of that this late in a short session are negligible. Those bills are dead."

Jedson's predictions were justified. The bills came out of committee with a "do pass" recommendation late Saturday evening. That was the actual time; the State house clock had been stopped forty-eight hours before to permit first and second readings of an administration "must" bill. Therefore it was officially Thursday. I know that sounds cockeyed, and it is, but I am told that every legislature in the country does it toward the end of a crowded session.

The important point is that, Thursday or Saturday, the session would

adjourn some time that night. I watched Ditworth's bill come up in the assembly. It was passed, without debate, in the amended form. I sighed with relief. About midnight, Jedson joined me and reported that the same thing had happened in the senate. Sally was on watch in the conference committee room, just to make sure that the bills stayed dead.

Joe and I remained on watch in our respective houses. There was probably no need for it, but it made us feel easier. Shortly before two in the morning, Bodie came in and said we were to meet Jedson and Sally outside the conference committee room.

"What's that?" I said, immediately all nerves. "Has something slipped?"

"No, it's all right and it's all over. Come on."

Joe answered my question, as I hurried up with Bodie trailing, before I could ask it. "It's O. K., Archie. Sally was present when the committee adjourned *sine die*, without acting on those bills. It's all over—we've won!"

We went over to the bar across the street to have a drink in celebration.

IN SPITE of the late hour, the bar was moderately crowded. Lobbyists, local politicians, legislative attachés, all the swarm of camp followers that throng the capitol whenever the legislature is sitting—all such were still up and around, and many of them had picked this bar as a convenient place to wait for news of adjournment.

We were lucky to find a stool at the bar for Sally. We three men made a tight little cluster around her and tried to get the attention of the overworked bartender. We had just managed to place our orders when a young man tapped on the shoulder the customer on the stool to the right of Sally. He immediately got down and left. I nudged Bodie to tell him to take the seat.

Sally turned to Joe. "Well, it won't be long now. There go the sergeants at arms." She nodded toward the young man, who was repeating the process farther down the line.

"What does that mean?" I asked Joe.

"It means they are getting along toward the final vote on the bill they were waiting on. They've gone to 'call of the house' now, and the speaker has ordered the sergeant at arms to send his deputies out to arrest absent members."

"Arrest them?" I was a little bit shocked.

"Only technically. You see, the assembly has had to stall until the senate was through with this bill, and most of the members have wandered out for a bite to eat, or a drink. Now they are ready to vote, so they round them up."

A fat man took a stool near us which had just been vacated by a member. Sally said, "Hello, Don."

He took a cigar from his mouth and said, "How are yuh, Sally? What's new? Say, I thought you were interested in that bill on magic?"

We were all four alert at once. "I am," Sally admitted. "What about it?"

"Well, then, you had better get over there. They're voting on it right. Didn't you notice the 'call of the house'?"

I THINK we set a new record getting across the street, with Sally leading the field in spite of her plumpness. I was asking Jedson how it could be possible, and he shut me up with, "I don't know, man! We'll have to see."

We managed to find seats on the main floor back of the rail. Sally beckoned to one of the pages she knew and sent him up to the clerk's desk for a copy of the bill that was pending. In front of the rail the assemblymen gathered in groups. There was a crowd around the desk of the administration floor leader and a smaller cluster around the floor leader of the opposition. The whips had individual members buttonholed here and there, arguing with them in tense whispers.

The page came back with the copy of the bill. It was an appropriation bill for the Middle Counties Improvement Project—the last of the "must" bills for which the session had been called—but pasted to it, as a rider, *was Ditworth's bill in its original, most damnable form!*

It had been added as an amendment in the senate, probably as a concession to Ditworth's stooges in order to obtain their votes to make up the two thirds majority necessary to pass the appropriation bill to which it had been grafted.

The vote came almost at once. It was evident, early in the roll call, that the floor leader had his majority in hand and that the bill would pass. When the clerk announced its passage, a motion to adjourn *sine die* was offered by the opposition floor leader and it was carried unanimously. The speaker called the two floor leaders to his desk and instructed them to wait on the governor and the presiding officer of the senate with notice of adjournment.

The crack of his gavel released us from stunned immobility. We shambled out.

WE GOT in to see the governor late the next morning. The appointment, squeezed into an overcrowded calendar, was simply a concession to Sally and another evidence of the high regard in which she was held around the capitol. For it was evident that he did not want to see us and did not have time to see us.

But he greeted Sally affectionately and listened patiently while Jedson explained in a few words why we thought the combined Ditworth-Middle Counties bill should be vetoed.

The circumstances were not favorable to reasoned exposition. The governor was interrupted by two calls that he had to take, one from his director of finance and one from Washington. His personal secretary came in once and shoved a memorandum under his eyes, at which the old man looked worried, then scrawled something on it and handed it back. I could tell that his attention was elsewhere for some minutes after that.

When Jedson stopped talking, the governor sat for a moment, looking down at his blotter pad, an expression of deep-rooted weariness on his face. Then he answered in slow words, "No, Mr. Jedson, I can't see it. I regret as much as you do that this business of the regulation of magic has been tied in with an entirely different matter. But I cannot veto part of a bill and sign the rest—even though the bill includes two widely separated subjects.

"I appreciate the work you did to help elect my administration"—I could see Sally's hand in that remark—"and wish that we could agree in this. But the Middle Counties Project is something that I have worked toward since my inauguration. I hope and believe that it will be the means whereby the most depressed area in our State can work out its economic problems without further grants of public money. If I thought that the amendment concerning magic would actually do a grave harm to the State—"

He paused for a moment. "But I don't. When Mrs. Logan called me this morning I had my legislative counsel analyze the bill. I agree that the bill is unnecessary, but it seems to do nothing more than add a little more bureaucratic red tape. That's not good, but we manage to do business under a lot of it; a little more can't wreck things."

I butted in—rudely, I suppose—but I was all worked up. "But, your excellency, if you would just take time to examine this matter yourself, in detail, you would see how much damage it will do!"

I would not have been surprised if he had flared back at me. Instead, he indicated a file basket that was stacked high and spilling over. "Mr. Fraser, there you see fifty-seven bills passed by this session of the legislature. Every one of them has some defect. Every one of them is of vital importance to some, or all, of the people of this State. Some of them are as long to read as an ordinary novel. In the next nine days I must decide what ones shall become law and what ones must wait for revision at the next regular session. During that nine days at least a thousand people will want me to see them about some one of those bills—"

His aid stuck his head in the door. "Twelve twenty, chief! You're on the air in forty minutes."

The governor nodded absently and stood up. "You will excuse me? I'm expected at a luncheon." He turned to his aid, who was getting out his hat and gloves from a closet. "You have the speech, Jim?"

"Of course, sir."

"Just a minute!" Sally had cut in. "Have you taken your tonic?"

"Not yet."

"You're not going off to one of those luncheons without it!" She ducked into his private washroom and came out with a medicine bottle. Joe and I bowed out as quickly as possible.

Outside I started fuming to Jedson about the way we had been given the run-around, as I saw it. I made some remark about dunderheaded, compromising politicians when Joe cut me short.

"Shut up, Archie! Try running a State sometime instead of a small business and see how easy you find it!"

I shut up.

Bodie was waiting for us in the lobby of the capitol. I could see that he was excited about something, for he flipped away a cigarette and rushed toward us. "Look!" he commanded. "Down there!"

We followed the direction of his finger and saw two figures just going out the big doors. One was Ditworth, the other was a well-known lobbyist with whom he had worked. "What about it?" Joe demanded.

"I was standing here behind this phone booth, leaning against the wall and catching a cigarette. As you can see, from here that big mirror reflects the bottom of the rotunda stairs. I kept an eye on it for you fellows. I noticed this lobbyist, Sims, coming downstairs by himself, but he was gesturing as if he were talking to somebody. That made me curious, so I looked around the corner of the booth and saw him directly. He was not alone; he was with Ditworth. I looked back at the mirror and he appeared to be alone. *Ditworth cast no reflection in the mirror!*"

Jedson snapped his fingers. "A demon!" he said in an amazed voice. "And I never suspected it!"

I am surprised that more suicides don't occur on trains. When a man is down, I know of nothing more depressing than staring at the monotonous scenery and listening to the maddening *lickety-tock* of the rails. In a way, I was glad to have this new development of Ditworth's inhuman status to think about; it kept my mind off poor old Feldstein and his thousand dollars.

Startling as it was to discover that Ditworth was a demon, it made no real change in the situation, except to explain the efficiency and speed with which we had been outmaneuvered and to confirm as a certainty our belief that the racketeers and Magic, Incorporated, were two heads of the same beast. For we had no way of proving that Ditworth was a Half World monster. If we tried to haul him into court for a test, he was quite capable of lying low and sending out a facsimile, or a mandrake, built to look like him and immune to the mirror test.

We dreaded going back and reporting our failure to the committee—at least I did. But we were spared that, at least. The Middle Counties act carried an emergency clause which put it into effect the day it was signed. Ditworth's bill, as an amendment, went into action with the same speed. The newspapers on sale at the station when we got off the train carried the names of the new commissioners for thaumaturgy.

Nor did the commisson waste any time in making its power felt. They announced their intention of raising the standards of magical practice in all fields, and stated that new and more thorough examinations would be prepared at once. The association formerly headed by Ditworth opened a coaching school in which practicing magicians could take a refresher course in

thaumaturgic principles and Arcane Law. In accordance with the high principles set forth in their charter, the school was not restricted to members of the association.

That sounds big-hearted of the association—it wasn't. They managed to convey a strong impression in their classes that membership in the association would be a big help in passing the new examinations. Nothing you could put your finger on to take into court—just a continuous impression. The association grew.

A couple of weeks later all licenses were canceled and magicians were put on a day-to-day basis in their practice, subject to call for re-examination at a day's notice. A few of the outstanding holdouts against signing up with Magic, Incorporated, were called up, examined, and licenses refused them. The squeeze was on. Mrs. Jennings quietly withdrew from any practice. Bodie came around to see me; I had an uncompleted contract with him involving some apartment houses.

"Here's your contract, Archie," he said bitterly. "I'll need some time to pay the penalties for noncompletion; my bond was revoked when they canceled the licenses."

I took the contract and tore it in two. "Forget that talk about penalties," I told him. "You take your examinations and we'll write a new contract."

He laughed unhappily. "Don't be a Pollyanna."

I changed my tack. "What are you going to do? Sign up with Magic, Incorporated?"

He straightened himself up. "I've never temporized with demons; I won't start now."

"Good boy," I said. "Well, if the eating gets uncertain, I reckon we can find a job of some sort here for you."

It was a good thing that Bodie had some money saved, for I was a little too optimistic in my offer. Magic, Incorporated, moved quickly into the second phase of their squeeze, and it began to be a matter of speculation as to whether I myself would eat regularly. There were still quite a number of licensed magicians in town who were not employed by Magic, Incorporated—it would have been an evident, actionable frame-up to freeze out everyone—but those available were all incompetent bunglers, not fit to mix a philter. There was not competent, legal magical assistance to be gotten at any price—except through Magic, Incorporated.

I was forced to fall back on old-fashioned methods in every respect. Since I don't use much magic in any case, it was possible for me to do that—but it was the difference between making money and losing money.

I had put Feldstein on as a salesman after his agency folded up under him. He turned out to be a crackajack and helped to reduce the losses. He could smell a profit even farther than I could—farther than Dr. Worthington could smell a witch.

But most of the other businessmen around me were simply forced to capitulate. Most of them used magic in at least one phase of their business; they had their choice of signing a contract with Magic, Incorporated, or closing their doors. They had wives and kids—they signed.

The fees for thaumaturgy were jacked up until they were all the traffic would bear, to the point where it was just cheaper to do business with magic than without it. The magicians got none of the new profits; it all stayed with the corporation. As a matter of fact, the magicians got less of the proceeds than when they had operated independently, but they took what they could get and were glad of the chance to feed their families.

Jedson was hard hit—disastrously hit. He held out, naturally, preferring honorable bankruptcy to dealing with demons, but he used magic throughout his business—he was through. They started by disqualifying August Welker, his foreman, then cut off the rest of his resources. It was intimated that Magic, Incorporated, did not care to deal with him, even had he wished it.

We were all over at Mrs. Jennings' late one afternoon for tea—myself, Jedson, Bodie, and Dr. Royce Worthington, the witch smeller. We tried to keep the conversation away from our troubles, but we just could not do it. Anything that was said led back somehow to Ditworth and his damnable monopoly.

After Jack Bodie had spent ten minutes explaining carefully and mendaciously that he really did not mind being out of witchcraft, that he did not have any real talent for it, and had only taken it up to please his old man, I tried to change the subject. Mrs. Jennings had been listening to Jack with such pity and compassion in her eyes that I wanted to bawl myself.

I turned to Jedson and said inanely, "How is Miss Megeath?"

She was the white witch from Jersey City, the one who did creative magic in textiles. I had no special interest in her welfare.

He looked up with a start. "Ellen? She's . . . she's all right. They took her license away a month ago," he finished lamely.

That was not the direction I wanted the talk to go. I turned it again. "Did she ever manage to do that whole-garment stunt?"

He brightened a little. "Why, yes, she did—once. Didn't I tell you about it?" Mrs. Jennings showed polite curiosity, for which I silently thanked her. Jedson explained to the others what they had been trying to accomplish. "She really succeeded too well," he continued. "Once she had started, she kept right on, and we could not bring her out of her trance. She turned out over thirty thousand little striped sports dresses, all the same size and pattern. My lofts were loaded with them. Nine tenths of them will melt away before I dispose of them.

"But she won't try it again," he added. "Too hard on her health."

"How?" I inquired.

"Well, she lost ten pounds doing that one stunt. She's not hardy enough

for magic. What she really needs is to go out to Arizona and lie around in the sun for a year. I wish to the Lord I had the money. I'd send her."

I cocked an eyebrow at him. "Getting interested, Joe?" Jedson is an inveterate bachelor, but it pleases me to pretend otherwise. He generally plays up, but this time he was downright surly. It showed the abnormal state of nerves he was in.

"Oh, for cripes sake, Archie! Excuse me, Mrs. Jennings! But can't I take a normal humane interest in a person without you seeing an ulterior motive in it?"

"Sorry."

"That's all right." He grinned. "I shouldn't be so touchy. Anyhow, Ellen and I have cooked up an invention between us that might be a solution for all of us. I'd been intending to show it to all of you just as soon as we had a working model. Look, folks!" He drew what appeared to be a fountain pen out of a vest pocket and handed it to me.

"What is it? A pen?"

"No."

"A fever thermometer?"

"No. Open it up."

I unscrewed the cap and found that it contained a miniature parasol. It opened and closed like a real umbrella, and was about three inches across when opened. It reminded me of one of those clever little Japanese favors one sometimes gets at parties, except that it seemed to be made of oiled silk and metal instead of tissue paper and bamboo.

"Pretty," I said, "and very clever. What's it good for?"

"Dip it in water."

I looked around for some. Mrs. Jennings poured some into an empty cup, and I dipped it in.

It seemed to crawl in my hands.

In less than thirty seconds I was holding a full-sized umbrella in my hands and looking as silly as I felt. Bodie smacked a palm with a fist.

"It's a lulu, Joe! I wonder why somebody didn't think of it before."

Jedson accepted congratulations with a fatuous grin, then added, "That's not all—look." He pulled a small envelope out of a pocket and produced a tiny transparent raincoat, suitable for a six-inch doll. "This is the same gag. And this." He hauled out a pair of rubber overshoes less than an inch long. "A man could wear these as a watch fob, or a woman could carry them on a charm bracelet. Then, with either the umbrella or the raincoat, one need never be caught in the rain. The minute the rain hits them; presto!—full size. When they dry out they shrink up."

We passed them around from hand to hand and admired them. Joe went on. "Here's what I have in mind. This business needs a magician—that's you, Jack—and a merchandiser—that's you, Archie. It has two major stockholders; that's Ellen and me. She can go take the rest cure she needs, and I'll retire and resume my studies, same as I always wanted to."

I looked back—and nearly fell off! Mrs. Jennings was—beautiful!

My mind immediately started turning over the commercial possibilities, then I suddenly saw the hitch. "Wait a minute, Joe—we can't set up business in this State."

"No."

"It will take some capital to move out of the State. How are you fixed? Frankly, I don't believe I could raise a thousand dollars if I liquidated."

He made a wry face. "Compared with me you are rich."

I got up and began wandering nervously around the room. We would just have to raise the money somehow. It was too good a thing to be missed, and would rehabilitate all of us. It was clearly patentable, and I could see commercial possibilities that would never occur to Joe. Tents for camping, canoes, swimming suits, traveling gear of every sort. We had a gold mine.

Mrs. Jennings interrupted in her sweet and gentle voice. "I am not sure it will be too easy to find a State in which to operate."

"Excuse me—what did you say?"

"Dr. Royce and I have been making some inquiries. I am afraid you will find the rest of the country about as well sewed up as this State."

"What! Forty-eight States?"

"Demons don't have the same limitations in time that we have."

That brought me up short. Ditworth again.

Gloom settled down on us like fog. We discussed it from every angle and came right back to where we had started. It was no help to have a clever, new business; Ditworth had us shut out of every business. There was an awkward silence.

I finally broke it with an outburst that surprised myself. "Look here!" I exclaimed. "This situation is intolerable. Let's quit kidding ourselves and admit it. As long as Ditworth is in control we're whipped. Why don't we do something?"

Jedson gave me a pained smile. "God knows I'd like to, Archie, if I could think of anything useful to do."

"But we know who our enemy is—Ditworth! Let's tackle him—legal or not, fair means or dirty!"

"But that is just the point—do we know our enemy? To be sure, we know he is a demon, but what demon, and where? Nobody has seen him in weeks."

"Huh? But I thought just the other day—"

"Just a dummy, a hollow shell. The real Ditworth is somewhere out of sight."

"But look, if he is a demon, can't he be invoked, and compelled—"

Mrs. Jennings answered this time. "Perhaps—though it's uncertain and dangerous. But we lack one essential—his name. To invoke a demon, you must know his real name, otherwise he will not obey you, no matter how powerful the incantation. I have been searching the Half World for weeks, but I have not learned that necessary name."

Dr. Worthington cleared his throat with a rumble as deep as a cement

mixer, and volunteered, "My abilities are at your disposal, if I can help to abate this nuisance—"

Mrs. Jennings thanked him. "I don't see how we can use you as yet, doctor. I knew we could depend on you."

Jedson said suddenly, "White prevails over black."

She answered, "Certainly."

"Everywhere?"

"Everywhere, since darkness is the absence of light."

He went on, "It is not good for the white to wait on the black."

"It is not good."

"With my brother Royce to help, we might carry light into darkness."

She considered this. "It is possible, yes. But very dangerous."

"You have been there?"

"On occasion. But you are not I, nor are these others."

Everyone seemed to be following the thread of the conversation but me. I interrupted with, "Just a minute, please. Would it be too much to explain what you are talking about?"

"There was no rudeness intended, Archibald," said Mrs. Jennings in a voice that made it all right. "Joseph has suggested that, since we are stalemated here, that we make a sortie into the Half World, smell out this demon, and attack him on his home ground."

IT TOOK me a moment to grasp the simple audacity of the scheme. Then I said, "Fine! Let's get on with it. When do we start?"

They lapsed back into a professional discussion that I was unable to follow. Mrs. Jennings dragged out several musty volumes and looked up references on points that were sheer Sanskrit to me. Jedson borrowed her almanac, and he and the doctor stepped out into the back yard to observe the moon.

Finally it settled down into an argument—or rather discussion; there could be no argument, as they all deferred to Mrs. Jennings' judgment—concerning liaison. There seemed to be no satisfactory way to maintain contact with the real world, and Mrs. Jennings was unwilling to start until it was worked out. The difficulty was this: Not being black magicians, not having signed a compact with Old Nick, they were not citizens of the Dark Kingdom and could not travel through it with certain impunity.

Bodie turned to Jedson. "How about Ellen Megeath?" he inquired doubtfully.

"Ellen? Why, yes, of course. She would do it. I'll telephone her. Mrs. Jennings, do any of your neighbors have a phone?"

"Never mind," Bodie told him, "just think about her for a few minutes so that I can get a line—" He stared at Jedson's face for a moment, then disappeared suddenly.

Perhaps three minutes later Ellen Megeath dropped lightly out of nothing. "Mr. Bodie will be along in a few minutes," she said. "He stopped

to buy a pack of cigarettes." Jedson took her over and presented her to Mrs. Jennings. She did look sickly, and I could understand Jedson's concern. Every few minutes she would swallow and choke a little, as if bothered by an enlarged thyroid.

As soon as Jack was back they got right down to details. He had explained to Ellen what they planned to do, and she was entirely willing. She insisted that one more session of magic would do her no harm. There was no advantage in waiting; they prepared to depart at once. Mrs. Jennings related the marching orders. "Ellen, you will need to follow me in trance, keeping in close rapport. I think you will find that couch near the fireplace a good place to rest your body. Jack, you will remain here and guard the portal." The chimney of Mrs. Jennings' living-room fireplace was to be used as most convenient. "You will keep in touch with us through Ellen."

"But granny, I'll be needed in the Half—"

"No, Jack." She was gently firm. "You are needed here much more. Someone has to guard the way and help us back, you know. Each to his task."

He muttered a bit, but gave in. She went on, "I think that is all. Ellen and Jack here; Joseph, Royce, and myself to make the trip. You will have nothing to do but wait, Archibald, but we won't be longer than ten minutes, world time, if we are to come back." She bustled away toward the kitchen, saying something about the unguent and calling back to Jack to have the candles ready. I hurried after her.

"What do you mean," I demanded, "about me having nothing to do but wait? I'm going along!"

She turned and looked at me before replying, troubled concern in her magnificent eyes. "I don't see how that can be, Archibald."

Jedson had followed us and now took me by the arm. "See here, Archie, do be sensible. It's utterly out of the question. You're not a magician."

I pulled away from him. "Neither are you."

"Not in a technical sense, perhaps, but I know enough to be useful. Don't be a stubborn fool, man; if you come, you'll simply handicap us."

That kind of an argument is hard to answer and manifestly unfair. "How?" I persisted.

"Hell's bells, Archie, you're young and strong and willing, and there is no one I would rather have at my back in a roughhouse, but this is not a job for courage, or even intelligence alone. It calls for special knowledge and experience."

"Well," I answered, "Mrs. Jennings has enough of that for a regiment. But—if you'll pardon me, Mrs. Jennings!—she is old and feeble. I'll be her muscles if her strength fails."

Joe looked faintly amused, and I could have kicked him. "But that is not what is required in—"

Dr. Worthington's double-bass rumble interrupted him from somewhere

behind us. "It occurs to me, brother, that there may possibly be a use for our young friend's impetuous ignorance. There are times when wisdom is too cautious."

Mrs. Jennings put a stop to it. "Wait—all of you," she commanded, and trotted over to a kitchen cupboard. This she opened, moved aside a package of rolled oats, and took down a small leather sack. It was filled with slender sticks.

She cast them on the floor, and the three of them huddled around the litter, studying the patterns. "Cast them again," Joe insisted. She did so.

I saw Mrs. Jennings and the doctor nod solemn agreement to each other. Jedson shrugged and turned away. Mrs. Jennings addressed me, concern in her eyes. "You will go," she said softly. "It is not safe, but you will go."

WE WASTED no more time. The unguent was heated and we took turns rubbing it on each other's backbone. Bodie, as gatekeeper, sat in the midst of his pentacles, mekagrans, and runes, and intoned monotonously from the great book. Worthington elected to go in his proper person; ebony in a breechcloth, parasymbols scribed on him from head to toe, his grandfather's head cradled in an elbow.

There was some discussion before they could decide on a final form for Joe, and the metamorphosis was checked and changed several times. He finished up with paper-thin gray flesh stretched over an obscenely distorted skull, a sloping back, the thin flanks of an animal, and a long, bony tail, which he twitched incessantly. But the whole composition was near enough to human to create a revulsion much greater than would be the case for a more outlandish shape. I gagged at the sight of him, but he was pleased. "There!" he exclaimed in a voice like scratched tin. "You've done a beautiful job, Mrs. Jennings. Asmodeus would not know me from his own nephew."

"I trust not," she said. "Shall we go?"

"How about Archie?"

"It suits me to leave him as he is."

"Then how about your own transformation?"

"I'll take care of that," she answered, somewhat tartly. "Take your places."

Mrs. Jennings and I rode double on the same broom, with me in front, facing the candle stuck in the straws. I've noticed All Hallow's Eve decorations which show the broom with the handle forward and the brush trailing. That is a mistake—custom is important in these matters. Royce and Joe were to follow close behind us. Seraphin leaped quickly to his mistress' shoulder and settled himself, his whiskers quivering with eagerness.

Bodie pronounced the word, our candle flared up high, and we were off. I was frightened nearly to panic, but tried not to show it as I clung to the broom. The fireplace gaped at us, and swelled to a monster arch. The fire

within roared up like a burning forest and swept us along with it. As we swirled up I caught a glimpse of a salamander dancing among the flames, and felt sure that it was my own—the one that had honored me with its approval and sometimes graced my new fireplace. It seemed a good omen.

We had left the portal far behind—if the word "behind" can be used in a place where directions are symbolic—the shrieking din of the fire was no longer with us, and I was beginning to regain some part of my nerve. I felt a reassuring hand at my waist, and turned my head to speak to Mrs. Jennings.

I nearly fell off the broom.

When we left the house there had mounted behind me an old, old woman, a shrunken, wizened body kept alive by an indomitable spirit. She whom I now saw was a young woman, strong, perfect, and vibrantly beautiful. There is no way to describe her—she was without defect of any sort, and imagination could suggest no improvement.

Have you ever seen the bronze "Diana of the Woods"? She was something like that, except that metal cannot catch the live, dynamic beauty that I saw.

But it was the same woman!

Mrs. Jennings—Amanda Todd, that was—at perhaps her twenty-fifth year, when she had reached the full maturity of her gorgeous womanhood, and before time had softened the focus of perfection.

I forgot to be afraid. I forgot everything except that I was in the presence of the most compelling and dynamic female I had ever known. I forgot that she was at least sixty years older than myself, and that her present form was simply a triumph of sorcery. I suppose if anyone had asked me at that time if I were in love with Amanda Jennings, I would have answered, "Yes!" But at the time my thoughts were much too confused to be explicit. She was there, and that was sufficient.

She smiled, and her eyes were warm with understanding. She spoke, and her voice was the voice I knew, even though it was rich contralto in place of the accustomed clear, thin soprano. "Is everything all right, Archie?"

"Yes," I answered in a shaky voice. "Yes, Amanda, everything is all right!"

As for the Half World— How can I describe a place that has no single matching criterion with what I have known? How can I speak of things for which no words have been invented? One tells of things unknown in terms of things which are known—here there is no relationship by which to link; all is irrelevant. All I can hope to do is tell how matters affected my human senses, how events influenced my human emotions, knowing that there are two falsehoods involved—the falsehood I saw and felt, and the falsehood that I tell.

I have discussed this matter with Jedson, and he agrees with me that the difficulty is insuperable, yet some things may be said with a partial element of truth—truth of a sort, with respect to how the Half World impinged on me.

There is one striking difference between the real world and the Half World. In the real world there are natural laws which persist through changes of custom and culture; in the Half World only custom has any degree of persistence, and of natural law there is none. Imagine, if you please, a condition in which the head of a State might repeal the law of gravitation and have his decree really effective—a place where King Canute could order back the sea and have the waves obey him. A place where "up" and "down" were matters of opinion, and directions might read as readily in days or colors as in miles.

And yet it was not a meaningless anarchy, for they were constrained to obey their customs as unavoidably as we comply with the rules of natural phenomena.

We made a sharp turn to the left in the formless grayness that surrounded us in order to survey the years for a sabbat meeting. It was Amanda's intention to face the Old One with the matter directly rather than to search aimlessly through ever-changing mazes of the Half World for a being hard to identify at best.

Royce picked out the sabbat, though I could see nothing until we let the ground come up to meet us and proceeded on foot. Then there was light and form. Ahead of us, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, was an eminence surmounted by a great throne which glowed red through the murky air. I could not make out clearly the thing seated there, but I knew it was "himself"—our ancient enemy.

We were no longer alone. Life—sentient, evil undeadness—boiled around us and fogged the air and crept out of the ground. The ground itself twitched and pulsated as we walked over it. Faceless things sniffed and nibbled at our heels. We were aware of unseen presences about us in the fog-shot gloom: beings that squeaked, grunted, and sniggered; voices that were slobbering whimpers, that sucked and retched and bleated.

They seemed vaguely disturbed by our presence—Heaven knows that I was terrified by them!—for I could hear them flopping and shuffling out of our path, then closing cautiously in behind, as they bleated warnings to one another.

A shape floundered into our path and stopped, a shape with a great bloated head and moist, limber arms. "Back!" it wheezed. "Go back! Candidates for witchhood apply on the lower level." It did not speak English, but the words were clear.

Royce smashed it in the face and we stamped over it, its chalky bones crunching underfoot. It pulled itself together again, whining its submission, then scurried out in front of us and thereafter gave us escort right up to the great throne.

"That's the only way to treat these beings," Joe whispered in my ear. "Kick 'em in the teeth first, and they'll respect you."

THERE was a clearing before the throne which was crowded with black witches, black magicians, demons in every foul guise, and lesser unclean things. On the left side the cauldron boiled. On the right, some of the company were partaking of the witches' feast. I turned my head away from that. Directly before the throne, as custom calls for, the witches' dance was being performed for the amusement of the Goat. Some dozens of men and women, young and old, comely and hideous, cavorted and leaped in impossible acrobatic adagio.

The dance ceased and they gave way uncertainly before us as we pressed up to the throne. "What's this? What's this?" came a husky, phlegm-filled voice. "It's my little sweetheart! Come up and sit beside me, my sweet! Have you come at last to sign my compact?"

Jedson grasped my arm; I checked my tongue.

"I'll stay where I am," answered Amanda in a voice crisp with contempt. "As for your compact, you know better."

"Then why are you here? And why such *odd* companions?" He looked down at us from the vantage of his throne, slapped his hairy thigh and laughed immoderately. Royce stirred and muttered; his grandfather's head chattered in wrath. Seraphin spat.

Jedson and Amanda put their heads together for a moment, then she answered, "By the treaty with Adam, I claim the right to examine."

He chuckled, and the little devils around him covered their ears. "You claim privileges here? With no compact?"

"Your customs," she answered sharply.

"Ah, yes, the customs! Since you invoke them, so let it be. And whom would you examine?"

"I do not know his name. He is one of your demons who has taken improper liberties outside your sphere."

"One of my demons, and you know not his name? I have seven million demons, my pretty. Will you examine them one by one, or all together?" His sarcasm was almost the match of her contempt.

"Altogether."

"Never let it be said that I would not oblige a guest. If you will go forward—let me see—exactly five months and three days, you will find my gentlemen drawn up for inspection."

I DO NOT recollect how we got there. There was a great, brown plain, and no sky. Drawn up in military order for review by their evil lord were all the fiends of the Half World, legion on legion, wave after wave. The Old One was attended by his cabinet; Jedson pointed them out to me—Lucifugé, the prime minister; Sataniacha, field marshal; Beezlebub and Leviathan, wing commanders; Ashtoreth, Abaddon, Mammon, Theutus, Asmodeus, and Incu-

bus, the Fallen Thrones. The seventy princes each commanded a division, and each remained with his command, leaving only the dukes and the thrones to attend their lord, Satan Mekratrig.

He himself still appeared as the Goat, but his staff took every detestable shape they fancied. Asmodeus sported three heads, each evil and each different, rising out of the hind quarters of a swollen dragon. Mammon resembled, very roughly, a particularly repulsive tarantula. Ashtoreth I cannot describe at all. Only the Incubus affected a semblance of human form, as the only vessel adequate to display his lecherousness.

The Goat glanced our way. "Be quick about it," he demanded. "We are not here for your amusement."

Amanda ignored him, but led us toward the leading squadron. "Come back!" he bellowed. And indeed we were back; our steps had led us no place. "You ignore the customs. Hostages first!"

Amanda bit her lip. "Admitted," she retorted, and consulted briefly with Royce and Jedson. I caught Royce's answer to some argument.

"Since I am to go," he said, "it is best that I choose my companion, for reasons that are sufficient to me. My grandfather advises me to take the youngest. That one, of course, is Fraser."

"What's this?" I said when my name was mentioned. I had been rather pointedly left out of all the discussions, but this was surely my business.

"Royce wants you to go with him to smell out Ditworth," explained Jedson.

"And leave Amanda here with these fiends? I don't like it."

"I can look out for myself, Archie," she said quietly. "If Dr. Worthington wants you, you can help me most by going with him."

"What is this hostage stuff?"

"Having demanded the right of examination," she explained, "you must bring back Ditworth—or the hostages are forfeit."

Jedson spoke up before I could protest. "Don't be a hero, son. This is serious. You can serve us all best by going. If you two don't come back, you can bet that they'll have a fight on their hands before they claim their forfeit!"

I WENT. Worthington and I had hardly left them before I realized acutely that what little peace of mind I had; came from the nearness of Amanda. Once out of her immediate influence the whole mind-twisting horror of the place and its grisly denizens hit me. I felt something rub against my ankles and nearly jumped out of my shoes. But when I looked down I saw that Seraphin, Amanda's cat, had chosen to follow me. After that, things were better with me.

Royce assumed his dog pose when we came to the first rank of demons. He first handed me his grandfather's head—once I would have found that mummified head repulsive to touch; it seemed a friendly, homey thing here. Then he was down on all fours, scalloping in and out of the ranks of infernal

warriors. Seraphin scampered after him, paired up and hunted with him. The hound seemed quite content to let the cat do half the work, and I have no doubt he was justified. I walked as rapidly as possible down the aisles between adjacent squadrons while the animals cast out from side to side.

It seems to me that this went on for many hours, certainly so long that fatigue changed to a wooden automatism and horror died down to a dull unease. I learned not to look at the eyes of the demons, and was no longer surprised at any outré shape.

Squadron by squadron, division by division, we combed them, until at last, coming up the left wing, we reached the end. The animals had been growing increasingly nervous. When they had completed the front rank of the leading squadron, the hound trotted up to me and whined. I suppose he sought his grandfather, but I reached down and patted his head.

"Don't despair, old friend," I said, "we have still these." I motioned toward the generals, princes all, who were posted before their divisions. Coming up from the rear as we had, we had yet to examine the generals of the leading divisions on the left wing. But despair already claimed me; what were half a dozen possibilities against an eliminated seven million?

The dog trotted away to the post of the nearest general, the cat close beside him, while I followed as rapidly as possible. He commenced to yelp before he was fairly up to the demon, and I broke into a run. The demon stirred and commenced to metamorphose. But even in this strange shape there was something familiar about it. "Ditworth!" I yelled, and dived for him.

I felt myself buffeted by leather wings, raked by claws. Royce came to my aid, a dog no longer, but two hundred pounds of fighting Negro. The cat was a ball of fury, teeth and claws. Nevertheless, we would have been lost, done in completely, had not an amazing thing happened. A demon broke ranks and shot toward us. I sensed him rather than saw him, and thought that he had come to succor his master, though I had been assured that their customs did not permit it. But he helped us—us, his natural enemies—and attacked with such vindictive violence that the gage was turned to our favor.

Suddenly it was all over. I found myself on the ground, clutching at, not a demon prince, but Ditworth in his pseudohuman form—a little, mild businessman, dressed with restrained elegance, complete to brief case, spectacles, and thinning hair.

"Take that thing off me," he said testily. "That thing" was grandfather, who was clinging doggedly with toothless gums to his neck.

Royce spared hand from the task of holding Ditworth and resumed possession of his grandfather. Seraphin stayed where he was, claws dug into our prisoner's leg.

The demon who had rescued us was still with us. He had Ditworth by the shoulders, talons dug into their bases. I cleared my throat and said, "I believe we owe this to you—" I had not the slightest notion of the proper thing to say. I think the situation was utterly without precedent.

The demon made a grimace that may have been intended to be friendly, but which I found frightening. "Let me introduce myself," he said in English, "I'm Federal Agent William Kane, bureau of investigation."

I think that was what made me faint.

I CAME to, lying on my back. Someone had smeared a salve on my wounds and they were hardly stiff, and not painful in the least, but I was mortally tired. There was talking going on somewhere near me. I turned my head and saw all the members of my party gathered together. Worthington and the friendly demon who claimed to be a G-man held Ditworth between them, facing Satan. Of all the mighty infernal army I saw no trace.

"So it was my nephew Nebiros," mused the Goat, shaking his head and clucking. "Nebiros, you are a bad lad and I'm proud of you. But I'm afraid you will have to try your strength against their champion now that they have caught you." He addressed Amanda. "Who is your champion, my dear?"

The friendly-demon spoke up. "That sounds like my job."

"I think not," countered Amanda. She drew him to one side and whispered intently. Finally he shrugged his wings and gave in.

Amanda rejoined the group. I struggled to my feet and came up to them. "A trial to the death, I think," she was saying. "Are you ready, Nebiros?" I was stretched between heart-stopping fear for Amanda and a calm belief that she could do anything she attempted. Jedson saw my face and shook his head. I was not to interrupt.

But Nebiros had no stomach for it. Still in his Ditworth form and looking ridiculously human, he turned to the Old One. "I dare not, uncle. The outcome is certain. Intercede for me."

"Certainly, nephew. I had rather hoped she would destroy you. You'll trouble me some day." Then to Amanda, "Shall we say ah ten thousand thousand years?"

Amanda gathered our votes with her eyes, including me, to my proud pleasure, and answered, "So be it." It was not a stiff sentence as such things go, I'm told—about equal to six months in jail in the real world—but he had not offended their customs; he had simply been defeated by white magic.

Old Nick brought down one arm in an emphatic gesture. There was a crashing roar and a burst of light and Ditworth-Nebiros was spread-eagled before us on a mighty boulder, his limbs bound with massive iron chains. He was again in demon form. Amanda and Worthington examined the bonds. She pressed a seal ring against each hasp and nodded to the Goat. At once the boulder receded with great speed into the distance until it was gone from sight.

"That seems to be about all, and I suppose you will be going now," announced the Goat. "All except this one—" He smiled at the demon G-man. "I have plans for him."

"No." Amanda's tone was flat.

"What's that, my little one? He has not the protection of your party —and he has offended our customs."

"No!"

"Really, I must insist."

"Satan Mekratrig," she said slowly, "do you wish to try your strength with me?"

"With you, madame?" He looked at her carefully, as if inspecting her for the first time. "Well, it's been a trying day, hasn't it? Suppose we say no more about it? Till another time, then—"

He was gone.

THE DEMON faced her. "Thanks," he said simply, "I wish I had a hat to take off." He added anxiously, "Do you know your way out of here?"

"Don't you?"

"No, that's the trouble. Perhaps I should explain myself. I'm assigned to the antimonopoly division; we got a line on this chap Ditworth, or Nebiros. I followed him in here, thinking he was simply a black wizard and that I could use his portal to get back. By the time I knew better it was too late, and I was trapped. I had about resigned myself to an eternity as a fake demon."

I was very much interested in his story. I knew, of course, that all G-men are either lawyers, magicians, or accountants, but all that I had ever met were accountants. This calm assumption of incredible dangers impressed me and increased my already high opinion of Federal agents.

"You may use our portal to return," Amanda said. "Stick close to us." Then to the rest of us, "Shall we go now?"

JACK BODIE was still intoning the lines from the book when we landed. "Eight and a half minutes," he announced, looking at his wrist watch. "Nice work. Did you turn the trick?"

"Yes, we did," acknowledged Jedson, his voice muffled by the throes of his remetamorphosis. "Everything that—"

But Bodie interrupted. "Bill Kane—you old scoundrel!" he shouted. "How did you get in on this party?" Our demon had shucked his transformation on the way and landed in his natural form—lean, young, and hard-bitten, in a quiet gray suit and snap-brim hat.

"Hi, Jack," he acknowledged. "I'll look you up tomorrow and tell you all about it. Got to report in now." With which he vanished.

Ellen was out of her trance and Joe was bending solicitously over her to see how she had stood up under it. I looked around for Amanda.

Then I heard her out in the kitchen and hurried out there. She looked up and smiled at me, her lovely young face serene and coolly beautiful. "Amanda," I said, "Amanda—"

I suppose I had the subconscious intention of kissing her, making love

to her. But it is very difficult to start anything of that sort unless the woman in the case in some fashion indicates her willingness. She did not. She was warmly friendly, but there was a barrier of reserve I could not cross. Instead, I followed her around the kitchen, talking inconsequentially, while she made hot cocoa and toast for all of us.

When we rejoined the others I sat and let my cocoa get cold, staring at her with vague frustration in my heart while Jedson told Ellen and Jack about our experiences. He took Ellen home shortly thereafter, and Jack followed them out.

When Amanda came back from telling them good night at the door, Dr. Royce was stretched out on his back on the hearthrug, with Seraphin curled up on his broad chest. They were both snoring softly. I realized suddenly that I was wretchedly tired. Amanda saw it, too, and said, "Lie down on the couch for a little and nap if you can."

I needed no urging. She came over and spread a shawl over me and kissed me tenderly. I heard her going upstairs as I fell asleep.

I WAS AWAKENED by sunlight striking my face. Seraphin was sitting in the window, cleaning himself. Dr. Worthington was gone, but must have just left, for the nap on the hearthrug had not yet straightened up. The house seemed deserted—then I heard her light footsteps in the kitchen. I was up at once and quickly out there.

She had her back toward me and was reaching up to the old-fashioned pendulum clock that hung on her kitchen wall. She turned as I came in—tiny, incredibly aged, her thin white hair brushed neatly into a bun.

It was suddenly clear to me why a motherly good-night kiss was all that I had received the night before—she had had enough sense for two of us, and had refused to permit me to make a fool of myself.

She looked up at me and said in a calm, matter-of-fact voice, "See, Archie, my old clock stopped yesterday"—she reached up and touched the pendulum—"but it is running again this morning."

THERE is not anything more to tell. With Ditworth gone, and Kane's report, Magic, Incorporated, folded up almost overnight. The new licensing laws were an unenforced dead letter even before they were repealed.

We all hang around Mrs. Jennings' place just as much as she will let us. I'm really grateful that she did not let me get involved with her younger self, for our present relationship is something solid, something to tie to. Just the same, if I had been born sixty years sooner, Mr. Jennings would have had some rivalry to contend with.

I helped Ellen and Joe organize their new business, then put Bodie in as manager, for I decided that I did not want to give up my old line. I've built the new wing and bought those two trucks, just as Mrs. Jennings' predicted. Business is good.

THE EXTRA BRICKLAYER

by A. M. PHILLIPS

● The ghastly bricklayer laid masonry rapidly—but they couldn't lay him rapidly or any other way!

Illustrated by Kramer.

NATURAL beauty and quaint history are blended in the village of Llanathyn. Rolling hills, cloaked in fine old forests of oak and maple, surround it. Even along the village streets there is a green, woodsy tang to the air; a cool, fresh sweetness that somehow makes you feel younger. On clear days the farther ranges appear, blue with distance.

Welsh pioneers built the town in the seventeenth century, on the banks of the clear, sleepy little river. It hasn't changed much since then; the river is still clear, undefiled by factory waste; and the smoke that rises from the village on frosty mornings is still the lazy immemorial blue smoke of the kitchen. If you've seen Williamsburg, or Salem, or Newcastle, Delaware—or any of a dozen of the old colonial towns—you know what it's like.

The gas station and the new highway are the only modern developments. They are odd and new and naked-looking in contrast with the stately old red brick houses, the weathered wrought-iron, the white colonial doorways.

Tourists are there at all seasons, exploring the battlefield and the quiet, elm-shaded streets of the village, but spring, with the flowering of the famous dogwood, brings them in greatest numbers.

October sets the oak and maple ablaze with tawny color, and Llanathyn glows with a soft brilliance, as though fired by the memory of those long-gone, stirring days when the ragged Continentals saw the redcoats run. The village forms a part of the battlefield, and many a leaden musket ball is lodged in the worn, old walls.

Historically, Llanathyn is known as the birthplace of that daring and reckless hero of the Revolutionary War, Major Alan Calby. It was here, also, and in the surrounding country, that a number of his famous sorties against the English took place. He was a young man when he went to war; young and full of deviltry and courage, and a brand of humor that raised the blood pressure of many a beefy English colonel.

Major Calby was given to practical jokes at the enemy's expense. They were sometimes grim and startling, but more often hilariously funny. In either case they did no good to pompous military dignity.

Legend says the gallant young major still rides Kingsbane, his white war horse, along the roads about Llanathyn on frosty, moonless nights. And translation to a higher life has not suppressed his penchant for practical jokes, the natives say.

With a thunder of hoofs, the spectral horse and rider passed the speeding car—

But, of course, that's just old wives' talk—

"Now get this, Brugman, and get it straight"—the fat, red-faced man leaned across the desk and slapped his pudgy hand upon the blotter in emphasis—"there's to be no labor trouble! This's got to be done quietly! The damned yokels around

here are growling already. Spoiling their village! The fools! And some gang of nuts are agitating to 'restore' Llanathyn—they want it made into a national park. You didn't know that, did you? Well, they've got a lobby in the capitol now. When they find out I'm putting up a hotel and laying out a golf course they're going to raise hell!

"I can put the squash on them. But if you start any of your chiseling tricks with the workmen, you'll have the unions after us. If it gets in the papers, we'll have the whole damned country sticking its nose in! There's an election coming up"—the senator walked across the room to the window and stood looking out on Charles Street—"and the voters mustn't get any wrong impressions."

Brugman watched him with an expression of distaste. "There won't be any trouble, senator," he began.

"There'd better not be." The senator turned to him. "There's contracts to be given out by the State next year. Don't forget it."

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," said a voice behind them, and both men whirled about in surprise. A young man in well-cut riding clothes stood by the door, hat in hand. He studied them coolly a moment, then his glance swept around the room.

"How did you get in here?" asked the senator, astonished.

The young man smiled and advanced into the room. The bright October sunlight streaming through the deep-set windows picked coppery lights out of his dark hair, and gleamed upon polished brown riding boots.

"Your secretary told me I'd find you here," he said, his gaze returning to the room and its furnishings. "Permit me to tell you, senator, that I find your taste abominable—modern office furniture is unsuited to a colonial room. No gentleman would need to be told, but then—" He made a gesture of disgust.

"Why, you—" Surprise sloughed all polish from the politician. He expressed himself in the language of the Fourth Ward. His already red face turned purple, and he started heavily toward the intruder. At the last moment he caught the young man's eye. It was cold, mocking, and it flamed with something that brought the fat, gross man to a halt. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"I've come here at some trouble, senator, to tell you you're not building an hotel in Llanathyn. Neither will you make the battlefield into a golf course." It was evident the stranger was restraining himself with an effort. "You want to make Llanathyn into a tourist trap; well, you're not going to. That swollen gut of yours is padded too well already, I think—"

Brugman gasped, and his small eyes popped. But the senator caught hold of his temper; few men dared talk to him like that. This must be someone of importance. With a visible effort he swallowed the bellow that was surging in his throat, and spoke cautiously. He had not become a power in the machine without caution.

"Now, now, young man. No need to lose our tempers. You misunderstand. My object is purely philanthropic. My only hope is to arouse the interest of our citizens in the preservation of Llanathyn. My hotel will provide accommodation, that is all. Thousands will come to view this landmark in our glorious history where only hundreds came before. And this will bring money to the good people of Llanathyn—"

The intruder further shocked Mr. Brugman by bursting into a full-throated roar of laughter. He rocked

with it, shook with sincere, joyous merriment! He *laughed* at the senator, a symbol of upright sobriety and righteousness to thousands of voters! Mr. Brugman, mouth open, backed away.

"It's good . . . by gad, it's superb—" gasped the young man. "Paine should hear he should, indeed—"

Even the senator was struck dumb at this exhibition. He stared at his visitor in speechless outrage.

"I understand well enough," said the young man, when he again had control of himself. "You'll destroy the Oak Grove, where the Marquis de La Fayette had his headquarters; you'll rip out the earthworks on Luder's Hill. Connecticut boys built that redoubt, but it was Pennsylvanians behind it when the English charged—the Yankees took them on the flank. And your first green—that would be the spot where the redcoats rallied, under that horse-faced colonel. A good man that colonel, but he couldn't get it through his head that colonials could fight.

"You'll destroy all this to bring money to Llanathyn? Llanathyn, hell! The populace must be a route of fools, that you even attempt such a lame lie as this! The money goes to your fat pockets, and when it is sucked dry Llanathyn can rot!

"Well, it won't. The Historical Society plans to make a park of this country, and to preserve Llanathyn as the colonial village it is. That will bring all the money Llanathyn needs, and without spoilage."

The senator was quiet now, his round, babyish face drained of color. "Before I have you thrown out," he said, his bloodshot eyes murderous, "what makes you think, you poor fool, that I won't build here?"

"I'll tell you," said the young man, and his smile was as mocking as the light that danced in his vivid, black eyes. "Major Calby won't like it. And if he doesn't like it, it won't happen!"

There was a moment of silence in the sunlit room.

"Who?" asked the senator.

"Major Alan Calby, of the Continental army." The stranger's laughing glance passed from one man to the other. Brugman sat in utter silence, apparently still stunned by the events of which he had been a witness. "You've heard of him," the young man added. "Aid to General Washington."

A tourist car went by outside, with a diminishing roar, and a faint breeze rustled the dry vine outside the window.

The senator studied his visitor. He considered himself, and rightly, a good judge of men. Politicians have to be.

Nothing but their quality was unusual in the young man's clothing. The flared whipcord breeches and rich red-brown jacket fitted superbly. His polished brown riding boots gleamed and sparkled in a pool of misty sunlight on the floor. Permanent crinkles of humor were set at the corners of his eyes, and lines of laughter edged his mouth. His strong, young face was deceptively amiable unless you noticed the firm lines of brow and jaw, and the light in the black eyes. Those eyes were sparkling now at some secret joke, and men secretly amused made the senator uneasy. The young man's skin, golden-tan, and glowing with health, suggested an outdoor life. A farmer? No, this man was no farmer.

And then the senator realized what it was about his visitor that was peculiar. It was his hair; it was too long. Not much, but just enough so

that it didn't fit with the smart riding clothes. It reminded him of—of a face from an old daguerreotype come to life. The hair did it, but there was also something about the clear, smooth skin, the shape of the face, the bold eyes—

"Are you trying to tell me," demanded the senator, "that this Revolutionary War soldier, who's been dead a hundred and fifty years—"

The young man laughed again, infectiously; the room rang with it. "You've heard of the major's activities, senator. And now you've been warned. You'll save yourself some trouble and expense by dropping this project. Good afternoon." He nodded cheerfully to the still speechless Brugman, and turned to the door.

"Wait!" said the senator. "Who are you? What's your name?"

The young man turned in the doorway. "Alan Calby," he said. Still smiling, he softly closed the door.

The senator went to the window and watched the young man walk away along Charles Street. He whistled as he walked, the young man did; an old and famous marching song:

"Father and I went down to camp,
Along with Captain Goodwin.
There we saw the men and boys,
As thick as hasty puddin'."

It came to the senator faintly, eerily, through the window glass.

The young man and his song went on along the quaint old street, through the sunlight and shadow, and the quiet houses of Llanathyn seemed to wake and listen—

The bricklayers had been at work a little more than a week when the foreman came into Brugman's office.

"There's something funny going on here, boss," said the foreman.

Brugman looked up. "Now, listen, Murphy. I told you we're having no trouble on this job—"

"It's not trouble, exactly. Some guy didn't collect his money on Saturday. Here it is Wednesday and he still ain't come in for his money."

"Well, the hell with him. What do you bring this stuff to me for? If he don't want his money, let him do without!"

"But, boss, there's somethin' else. How many bricklayers we got workin'?"

Brugman looked at his foreman biliously. "What's the matter with you? You been drinking?"

"No, sir." Murphy straightened up, and his broad, Irish face assumed an injured expression. "I ain't had a drop since Saturday night. But, boss— We hired fifty bricklayers, didn't we?"

"Of course we did. You ought to know that. You must be getting soft in the head, Murphy. Now get out of here!"

But the foreman didn't move. He'd gotten to the point he wanted to make, and now announced triumphantly: "Well, boss, we got fifty-one fellas layin' bricks out there!"

Brugman put down his pen, and stared at Murphy. "Of all the damned, crazy jobs I've ever had, this is the worst. I've taken enough from that pot-gutted old ward-heeler—you're not going to start, I'm telling you! You get funny with me, Murphy, and you'll be on the WPA!"

Murphy had expected to evoke a pleasing surprise. This explosion left him speechless.

Brugman regarded him loweringly. "Go down to the time card rack and bring me the card of the guy that didn't collect his wages." Murphy

turned to go. "And while you're there count the bricklayers' cards."

Murphy returned with an air of apology. "Fifty-one cards, boss," he announced. He'd sure picked a bad day to talk to the punk. He handed Brugman the card.

The contractor glanced at it, then his glance became a fixed stare. He went white, then scarlet. His lips moved, but he didn't speak. With a *plop!* he sat down in his chair. Murphy gaped at him.

"Get out of here!" snarled Brugman, noticing the foreman. "Get to hell out of here!"

Murphy got.

Brugman's eyes went back to the card he held. It was made out to Alan Calby. The number, stamped across it in red ink, was 1776.

"You're a fool, Brugman." It was late. The village of Llanathyn had gone to bed long ago. The senator poured a drink and passed it over. "Drink that and pull yourself together."

They were alone in the senator's office. A brass desk lamp threw an even light across the desktop; all else was in soft shadow. In the background square green file cases squatted before a disused colonial fireplace, concealing its white beauty. Outside, a thin October wind fluted around the house, and the dry vine at the window rustled and whispered.

"This Historical Society, or whatever it calls itself, must be used to playing with kids," said the senator, with heavy contempt. "Trying to scare me off with this ghost business! Huh!"

"But—"

"I've been trying to trace that fellow who said he was Alan Calby. Couldn't find him anywhere. They must have brought him from outside. But now we know where he is, so tomorrow you meet the men at the gate. I'll send a State trooper over. When he comes along pick him up. I'll fix up some charge."

"But what about the time card?" demanded Brugman plaintively.

"The time card?"

"The time card, damn it!" said the contractor, desperately. "What about it? How did he get one of our time cards, and get it made out like that? How did his name get on our books, that's what I want to know!"

"Listen, Brugman." The senator stared at him with scorn. "You're not telling me you believe you've got a ghost laying bricks for you! Don't be a fool!"

"Yes, but the bookkeeper says—"

"And you believe him!" The senator laughed. Faintly, outside, the wind seemed to laugh in answer, but the senator didn't notice it. "You believe him! That's the funniest thing yet, when you consider the business you're in!"

"You mean he's taking dough?"

"What else?"

"I'll fire the rat so hard he'll bounce from here to Philly! Scaring me like that! But wait a minute! Why isn't this guy collecting his wages?"

The senator frowned. "How do I know? Ask him tomorrow when you're taking him to the station."

THE NEXT morning at 8:00 a. m. Brugman and a State trooper waited outside the green wooden fence that encircled the building operation. Most of the workmen came by train from a nearby city, and Brugman could see the first of these coming up the long slope of King Street. From the edge of the village up the low hill to the site of the operations King Street had been continued—it was a long, rough, red scar across the rolling meadowland; the first of the

many scars the senator hoped to inflict.

As the men filed through the gate Brugman counted them, and examined each one carefully. By 8:25 fifty bricklayers had passed through, but still their man hadn't come. They waited another fifteen minutes, then Brugman called the foreman.

"How many bricklayers came in, Murphy?" he asked.

Murphy looked surprised, then suspicious. "Well, boss," he said, surveying the trooper curiously, "somethin' musta happened to that extra fella. He ain't shown up yet."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know, boss."

"Well, where does he live?"

"I don't know, either. I guess they'd have his address up at the office." Murphy was looking at his employer doubtfully. The expression on his face brought fire into the contractor's eyes.

Brugman started to say something, the hot color mounting in his face, then changed his mind, and whirled around. "Come on," he said to the trooper.

At his office he summoned a clerk and ordered her to bring him the address of Alan Calby. As she returned he knew with despair that something was wrong. She looked startled, puzzled.

"Oh, Mr. Brugman, I'm so sorry. . . I don't understand—"

"What the hell—" roared Brugman; then, more quietly, "What is it? What's the matter?"

"A mistake," the girl fluttered. "We'll have to check with our other records. I'm afraid—"

"Is there an address given on his card?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Then, for God's sake, tell me what it is!"

The girl glanced about her in a trapped, frustrated manner. "Well, it's— Why, it's the Fairview Cemetery!" She got it out in a burst. "Someone's made a mistake, Mr. Brugman. I'll correct it immediately. I'll call—"

"You're damn right somebody's made a mistake!" Brugman roared, and heaved his short, stocky body out of the chair, his eyes wild. "Get out of here, you!

"You can go," he said hoarsely to the astounded trooper. And, as the man made no move, "Go on! Get out! We'll settle this later."

The trooper had gone only five minutes, and Brugman was still standing, staring vacantly at the wall, when Murphy came in.

"Hello, boss," he said brightly. "Say, I made a mistake this mornin'. That fella Calby came on all right. He's workin' now, and his card was rang in at eight. Don't know how I missed him."

"Now, listen, Brugman." The senator's tone was the one he used when reassuring the taxpayers. "You're letting this thing get you down. It's nothing but a damn fool stunt—"

"You can talk, but I don't like it," repeated Brugman, obstinately. "I never bucked a ghost before, and I don't aim to start now!"

"A ghost!" The senator's scorn was withering. "I don't know what's got into you, Brugman! You never used to be such a sucker. You're playing right into their hands!"

The senator paced impatiently back and forth, and Brugman stared through the window at the tourists passing along the cheerful, sunlit street. He stared enviously—*they* didn't have a ghost laying bricks for them!

"I've told you time and again it's a gag," began the senator, again.

"That's all right," snapped Brugman, whirling on him. "Yeah, that's swell! Explains everything, don't it? But it don't explain what happened this morning! I told you, and I'll tell you again! There was me and this trooper waiting at the gate, and the guy didn't go in. And Murphy says he ain't there. But after the trooper's gone Murphy comes up and says he *is* there, and I go down and count 'em, and there's fifty-one. Fifty-one, I tell you! And the time card rung in at eight! You explain that, now!" Brugman was warming to his work. "And that address we got on our books! The Fairview Cemetery! I don't want no guy whose address is a cemetery working for me no matter whether he's a ghost or not—"

"It's a trick, I tell you!" interrupted the senator, irritably. "What's the difference how he did it? Did you see this man that says he's Calby?"

"I did not. I was satisfied to count them. I didn't go looking for him!"

The senator looked his contempt. "Well, go on back there and forget about this stuff. And don't bother me with it any further."

"Ain't you going to try to arrest him again?" asked Brugman, with surprise.

"Why should we?" The senator smiled unctuously. "You've got an extra man working for nothing. Let him work if he wants to; he's not hurting us." He glanced at a thick, gold watch that he drew from a waistcoat pocket. "I've got to go now, Brugman. You get back to work and forget this nonsense about ghosts. They'll soon get tired of playing spooks, and when they try something else I'll be ready for them!"

"All right," said Brugman, stubbornly unconvinced. "I'll go." At the door he turned. "But if I were you, I'd drop this business now, while you can get out of it cheap. This guy Calby's only starting. You watch!"

ANOTHER WEEK passed uneventfully. But peace was no consolation to Brugman. It was a "war of nerves," as far as he was concerned. Each morning he expected something to happen. When evening came with the peace still undisturbed, his gloomy apprehension only mounted.

He said nothing to Murphy about the extra bricklayer. And Murphy, who, to his own surprise, was learning tact, avoided the bricklayer named Calby as a topic of conversation. But he had a sickbed manner toward his employer that exposed the contractor to the danger of a stroke.

When Brugman saw his foreman coming toward him across the yard late one afternoon, he knew that whatever he had been awaiting had happened. Murphy looked shy, if you can imagine shyness in a man built on his lines.

"There's a little matter," said Murphy, his eyes fixed on a point about two feet above Brugman's head. "Er . . . . that there bricklayer named Calby, now—"

"Come up to the office," ordered Brugman, with resignation. He'd known it was coming.

When he was seated behind his desk, with the telephone within easy reach, he looked full at his foreman. "Now. What's the matter?"

"Well—" began Murphy. He caught a glimpse of the fire beginning to shine in the contractor's eyes, and wasted no more words. "The men are complaining, boss. That there Calby's exceedin' the quota. He's layin' three times as many

bricks as anybody else. You gotta stop him, boss, or we're gonna have trouble sure!"

Brugman grinned like a shark. "Oh, he is, is he? Good! Fine! We'll see what Old Pot-gut has to say about *that!* Maybe he'll come down and ask him kindly not to work so hard."

Murphy edged toward the door. "You know, boss, I ain't feelin' so good. Maybe I better take a little time off—"

"You sit down!" roared Brugman. Murphy sat down, quickly; and the telephone operator at the other end of the line squealed. "No, not you!" snarled Brugman into the mouthpiece. "No! . . . What? Hell, no! . All right! *All* right! I won't swear again, damn it! . . Now, listen, you!" Brugman's voice had an edge that would saw wood. "You get me my party, and shut up!"

He told the senator what had happened and then listened, idiotically delighted, to the senator's words. He'd gotten into the old grafter that time!

"Arrest him, huh? All right," said Brugman, deeply pleased with himself, "*you* come down and arrest him! You come down with your cops and arrest him. Or maybe you'd like to fire him, huh? Stick a note in his pay envelope Saturday, and tell him he's through!" He dropped the receiver and lay back in his chair, roaring with laughter.

Murphy's lower jaw was hanging. His wide, blue eyes slowly took on the look of a panicky horse.

THEY didn't arrest the bricklayer named Calby. It was a funny thing, but the police just couldn't seem to find him. Finally, the lieutenant himself came down, and Murphy pointed the man out to him. But as the lieutenant and two troopers went toward him, Calby put down his tools and walked casually away. He passed through the gate and vanished behind the green fence. The troopers followed him. When they got outside, there was no one in sight. No one. The meadow was vacant, clear down the long slope of the hill to the edge of the village. The fence, with almost a city block to its next corner, was blank, and innocent of gate or door. A trooper sprang back and stared about inside, as though he thought Calby had leaped back in, over the twelve-foot fence.

The lieutenant walked back in bewilderment to Murphy. "You got any trapdoors or tunnels around here?" he asked.

Murphy stared at him in astonishment. "Of course not," he said, disgustedly. "What do you think we're buildin' here? A rat trap? What's this guy gettin' pinched for—'cause he's layin' too many bricks?"

The lieutenant looked at him dan-

gerously. "Are you trying to be funny?"

"O. K. O. K. Don't get sore. But what *are* you pickin' him up for?"

"That's not your business," replied the lieutenant shortly, and walked away.

At the gate he met Brugman, coming in. "You didn't get him," said the contractor. It was a statement rather than a question.

"No, we didn't get him." The lieutenant, like Murphy, was aware of the presence of something peculiar and confusing. "What is this—a gag? Three days now my men are coming down here to arrest this guy. When they're here he ain't; when they ain't here, he is! Now, look; they got work to do, see? Maybe you'd like me to station a noncom down here permanently—"

"Don't talk to me!" interrupted Brugman, happily. Somebody besides himself was worrying about Calby now. "I didn't order his arrest. I don't even know what you're arresting him for. Why don't you go out to his home address and get him there?"

"What is it?" asked the lieutenant, innocently.

"The Fairview Cemetery!" and Brugman roared with laughter.

The lieutenant looked at him offendedly. "Nuts," he said. "They're all nuts!"

AT THAT moment a long, suave, black limousine pulled up to the gate. The senator extracted himself with some difficulty, because of his girth, and the pompous dignity of his approach was ruined completely by the unstable footing afforded by the raw, rutted earth. Brugman, the lieutenant, and the two troopers made a sober and attentive audience.

"Ah. Good afternoon, gentlemen," said the senator as he joined them. He was in public now, and his manners were pontifical. "I see you're here yourself, lieutenant. I appreciate that. We public servants can never be too diligent. I may say I take pleasure in knowing an official so attentive to his duties. You got this man Calby, of course?"

The lieutenant looked at him thoughtfully. "No, senator. We haven't picked him up yet. That's why I came down—"

"You haven't! In three days? That's rather peculiar, lieutenant. I have no wish to criticize, but certainly in three days you should have arrested this man. Especially as he has reported here for work on each of those days. I don't understand this."

"It seems to me, sir," said the lieutenant, "that this contractor and his foreman, and possibly the other men, are protecting him. I very nearly had him myself just now, and somebody here concealed him. There's no other explanation, sir. One moment he was here and the next he was gone!"

The senator started, and his babyish face changed color. He looked at the trooper closely. "You mean he vanished? You saw him disappear right before your eyes?"

The expression that skittered across the lieutenant's stolid face set a new high in delight for Brugman.

"No, sir," said the officer, ending a silence that was becoming portentous. "I don't mean just that. He went out the gate. We came out almost immediately behind him, and he was gone. Out of sight. It didn't seem to me that there was enough time for him to do that, even if he'd started running as soon as he passed the gate. He was concealed somewhere, I think. I questioned the

foreman about it, and he acted strangely. I was about to suggest that I take the foreman and a number of the laborers to the station for questioning."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed the senator, hurriedly. "You mustn't do that, lieutenant! There's no question of assistance from the other men. Probably the man hid in the meadow grass, or ran more swiftly than you thought. Just keep your men posted here awhile." He smiled lushly. "You'll get him."

A FEW LABORERS had passed the little group while they were talking. Brugman, astonished, watched them go out the gate. But the conversation had been too interesting to the contractor to permit of interruption. Now, however, a steady stream of men were going by, walking with a sort of purposeful indignation, and looking straight ahead. They marched out the gate. And none came back.

"Hey!" yelled Brugman. "What is this? Where you guys going?"

No one answered him, but Murphy pushed his way through the thickening crowd. "It's no use, boss," he said, sadly, when he got close to them. "I told you. We got trouble, now, all right. It's a strike."

"A . a strike! No!" squealed the senator, flapping pudgy hands futilely. "Here! You men! Wait! We'll fix this! I've got money—"

"Stop them, Murphy!" said Brugman. "Tell them we'll pay for the extra bricks that guy laid! Tell them it was a bet! Tell them anything!"

"It ain't that, boss," said Murphy. "It ain't the extra bricks. They found out just now that that guy ain't a union man. He told them so himself! Told them his card was a phony, and that he never belonged to no union, and never would! Gosh, boss! You hirin' a scrab"—Murphy looked ready to burst into tears—"and a guy like that, too, and us with our record!"

Silence, weighty and profound, descended, broken only by the diminishing shuffle of departing feet.

A wizened little bookkeeper with a sourly sardonic face scurried toward them across the empty yard. "Say, Murphy," he called, "that guy in there ain't only nonunion—he's nuts, too! He's in there now calling up the papers and telling them Brugman's got another strike on him! And laughing like hell!"

The lieutenant almost sprang back in surprise at the look of concentrated hatred the senator turned upon him. "Get him!" howled the senator. "Do you hear me! Get him! I'll send him up for life! I'll hang him! Get him, you—" The senator used words no senator ever should.

The lieutenant ran, the troopers ran, Murphy ran. They searched every possible and impossible place. But the extra bricklayer had gone.

IT WAS in the papers next day, all right.

CONTRACTOR DEFIES UNIONS!

James C. Brugman, the contractor notorious for his past troubles with the labor unions, employs nonunion labor as a gesture of defiance, labor leaders say. "This is a fight to the finish," Brugman is quoted as saying—

Brugman groaned. And Murphy got drunk.

The train that brought the papers brought reporters—some cubs and a few older men for whom the city editors had, at the moment, no better use. A dull assignment, they thought, until they started nosing

around, as reporters will. Presently wires began humming. Editors began asking, "Where the hell's Llanathyn?" Old photographs were dug out of the morgue. And more important journalists arrived, tried to get past the gate in the green fence, began asking questions which the Historical Society was only too eager to answer.

So the second day— Well, it was a field day for the opposition newspapers. They reported in detail the senator's plan to "profit personally at the expense of a national shrine," and were themselves impossibly pious about it. "EXPLOITATION!" it seemed to the senator, shrieked at him from every paper he picked up.

"Unfit for public office" was another phrase he came to know. And "This cold-blooded desecration . . . by a man utterly without patriotism, reverence, or honor—" really got into him! The senator's monumental contempt for the public, and for public opinion, was taking body punches that hurt! It was, all in all, a bad day for the senator.

It got worse, when his political confreres reached him. They spoke behind closed doors, and what they said wasn't published. But they left the senator in no doubt of their opinion of his intelligence, or what his future course of action should—and would—be.

So it was at their suggestion that the senator summoned reporters the next day, and prepared to explain everything. He looked like a debauched and malignant infant as he paced nervously before his desk in the house on Charles Street. Even his rotund voice was thinner.

"Gentlemen," he began, "this is all a tragic mistake! I scorn to answer these mud-slinging radicals, these political scavengers, who are trying to brand me with the crass motive of material gain! The people of this great State—my honored fellow citizens—will smile as scornfully as myself, for they will be remembering my lifelong devotion to the public good, my long and unblemished record in office, of which I am humbly and justly proud! And it is to these, my intelligent fellow citizens—it is before this great and just tribunal—that I make answer, that I plead guilty. Guilty, yes! But never of malfeasance, of betrayal! Guilty, rather, of carelessness, guilty of a too great devotion to my duties of office! And that, gentlemen, is the simple explanation of this unfortunate affair. My efforts on behalf of the intelligent citizenry of this great commonwealth have left little time for attention to personal affairs. These I had turned over entirely to my attorneys. This hotel was to have been no more than an ordinary investment, the details of which were left entirely in their hands. And Mr. Barklund, the senior partner, has taken full responsibility for the unfortunate selection of the site for this hotel. His excuse is that, in the rush of business, the historic importance of Llanathyn escaped him. I cannot blame Mr. Barklund. Having decided upon an hotel as an investment, my instructions were definite; he was to consult me not at all. My time was to be devoted entirely to official duties. I blame myself."

The senator shook his head, and paused to stare, theatrically sorrowful, out upon the sunlit street. The reporters' faces were determinedly respectful, although one or two of the older men were smothering yawns. Brugman sat in a corner, in sparrowlike dejection.

"To think that I, of all men, might have unwittingly been responsible for the desecration of this sacred soil!" The senator's voice was gath-

cring strength. "It has shaken me, gentlemen! Shaken me profoundly. But I shall not permit the shock I have suffered to affect the execution of my duties! That I promise the good people of our State! And, further, I personally shall lead the fight for the preservation of this sanctified spot! I shall demand that Llanathyn be preserved as an eternal memorial to our glorious history, and to those heroic dead that lie here!"

The senator thrust out his chest. His eyes focused beyond them. This was the kind of work he knew!

"It shall never be said"—his voice boomed and rolled—"that I have not been in the forefront of the fray, that I do not defend to the last drop of my blood our great heritage—"

Brugman nodded off to sleep, and forgot his misery.

It was a crispy, frosty, moonless night. Llanathyn was dark and silent as Brugman and the senator departed for the city in the senator's big black limousine. It was late and the roads were empty; nothing moved through all the countryside but the keening wind, and the black masses of the trees that bowed before it, leaves whispering. Overhead, undimmed by man-made lights, the stars blazed with a brilliance never seen in cities.

Only the road was new; it gleamed in the glare of the headlights. Otherwise they might have been riding through the time and the land that had known the hoofbeats of Kingsbane, and the shape of Major Calby. It seemed to Brugman that, over the motor's low pur, over the far-away surflike sound of the wind in the trees, he caught now and again the faint, ghostly beat of those legendary hoofs.

The contractor was badly shaken by the experience he had undergone; he had been changed by it, shifted

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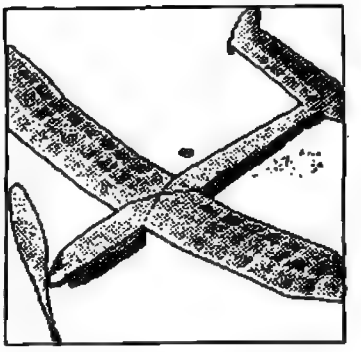

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forever out of the mental orbit in which he had swung. Brugman had never consciously formulated a philosophy of life—he had been an instinctive materialist, powered by the rule of "grab what you can!" Now he saw all the familiar values, scales and axioms that had guided him for so long tumbling, fading from clear-cut, iron-hard, self-evident truths to empty words, as insubstantial as smoke. His mind was a wild chaos, in which a gagging, primitive fear of the unknown took shuddering precedence. It was to this disturbed and tumultuous mental state that he attributed the half-heard sound of galloping hoofs.

The senator had not been changed; he had simply become more of what he was. A vindictive malignancy, a fury to be revenged upon the spurious ghost, had driven everything else from his mind, had become almost an obsession.

"I'll get detectives, good detectives!" he was saying. "They'll get him! They'll get him if they have to chase him to California!"

Brugman suddenly went very white. He sat very stiff and still in his corner. "Hoofs!" he said in a strange, thick, choked voice. "That horse— He's coming!"

Those galloping hoofs were not in his imagination. They were clear and ringing now, potent in the night's silence, a drum-roll in the frosty dark! They were overhauling the car, and the senator's chauffeur had no need of respect for speed limits!

The senator heard them now, and listened in surprise. "What's that?" he asked. The chauffeur was peering into his mirror in gaping unbelief.

A huge, white, surging shape drew abreast, swept ahead. Loud and furious was the rolling thunder of hoofs, drowning every other sound.

Incredibly, the great, white horse pressed ahead, into the glare of the headlights, tail and mane flying like white fire in the swift night wind. On his back crouched a hard-riding figure, blue-coated, sabered, with scarlet-lined cape streaming out behind. The rider glanced back, his face creased with laughter.

Brugman was noisily sick in the back of the car.

"It's him!" howled the senator. "Get him, Morten! Get him! Run him down!"

Morten heard neither of them. But he saw the impossible—a man on a horse passing a car doing better than sixty! He lost his head. Brakes squealed. The huge, powerful car lurched and swayed. Lights danced wildly back and forth across the road. There was a moment when it seemed they must go over. Morten struggled fiercely, briefly—and won. The car, rocking and protesting, slid into the shrubbery at the side of the road with a snap and crackle of branches. It came to a stop, its lights on the roadway.

THERE WAS a soft *clop, clop,* and a panting breath, and into the light stepped that tall, proud horse. He looked real and solid; his deep chest heaved, and was flecked with foam, and his eyes rolled with the excitement of the gallop. There was even a faint creak of saddle leather.

The figure on the horse's back was erect now, the cape fallen in place. The three-cornered hat was set at a jaunty angle. The long saber sparkled in the light.

And the face was that of the man they had seen before, the clear skin glowing now with exertion, the black eyes sparkling.

"Hello, Bruggie! Couldn't let you

go without sayin' good-by, you know! It was fun, wasn't it?" That same clear, infectious laughter rang out.

The senator opened the door and got out, his expression like that of a boxer badly hurt. The laughter was cut off short. Brugman raised his head and saw the face of the man on the horse change. The boyishness left it; it was the face of a man now, of a kind of man too rarely seen today. Calmly the man on the horse studied the senator, yet in that calmness was great danger.

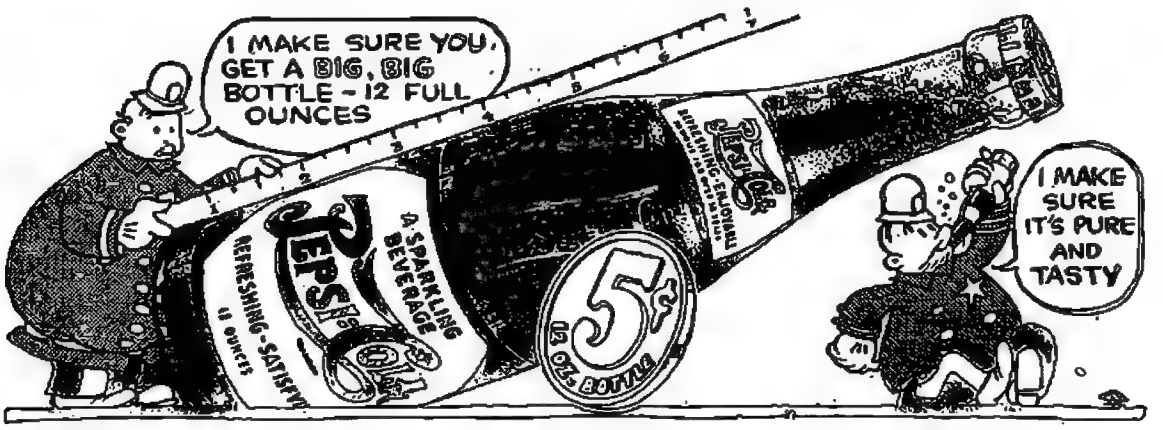
Half fainting from sickness and terror, Brugman held himself up; and into his mind, unbidden, sprang words dimly remembered from childhood: "—we pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." They were from some document—and this Calby seemed to call them forth—

"And you," said the horseman, watching the senator. "Your type is multiplying. We had your kind in my day. Oh, yes, we had them. But we dealt with them differently." He smiled again. "I wish you might have lived then. It would have been a pleasure to meet you." He drew a long-barreled pistol and twirled it on his finger. The white horse moved restlessly and tossed his head.

"Well," continued Calby, and thrust the pistol back reluctantly, "I know a splendid joke, but it is not permitted. I played it once on a Tory spy, who was traitor to both his countries, and you're the first man, senator, on whom I thought to play it since! So you do have a certain distinction." Abruptly he laughed again, his eyes gleaming with mirth. "I'll tell you what to do with your hotel, senator. Build it up in Winchester County! There's naught but rum-guzzling Tories up there; they won't give a damn! And call it the Calby Arms!" His laughter rang and rang again, and echoes answered. The white horse reared. "Good-by, Bruggie! Come up again sometime, and we'll have a gallop together!"

And while the three men watched in frozen, stupefied silence, horse and man became misty, transparent. They winked out like a flame. Then the hoofbeats began again. Away along the lonely road they raced, faster, faster. They faded, became fainter, mingled with their own echo. Then they were gone, and the night and the silence were one.

THE END.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THE HARDWOOD PILE

by L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

A hard-headed New Englander just wasn't the man to deal properly with a dryad in his lumber pile!

THIS is a world, one must sadly admit, wherein virtue often goes unrewarded. Specifically, if R. B. Wilcox had not been such a moral man, he might have gotten the true story of the haunted woodpile for his book on the lore and legends of upstate New York. In justice to Mr. Wilcox's morals, it should be stated that they, alone, were not responsible for his failure to get the inside dope. There was also the fact that carroty-red hair did not appeal to him. Perhaps there was something wrong with this hair; perhaps there was something wrong with R. B. Wilcox. Or, perhaps, the irresistible appeal of such hair has been overrated in song and story.

The hair in question belonged to Miss Aceria Jones, the hostess at The Pines. This was a self-styled tea room in the village of Gahato, county of Herkimer, State of New York. The Pines, despite the misleading sobriquet of "tea room," served liquor of all degrees of hardness, and had a passable dance orchestra. Not the least of its attractions was Miss Aceria Jones. She was an uncommonly pretty girl, looking rather like a plane hostess. If you have ever seen a plane hostess, you have a pretty good idea.

R. B. Wilcox had landed at The Pines in the course of his prowl around the county after lore and legends. After dinner he tried to collect some material. The restaurateur, a Mr. Earl Delacroix, was out. So the writer tackled Miss Jones. She gave him a little lore on the theory and practice of hostessing in an Adirondack sawmill town, but nothing that could be called a legend. To his questions about the haunted woodpile, she replied that she paid no attention to such silly stories.

In the hope of squeezing a little usable copy out of his charming questionee, Wilcox tried praise: "I'm surprised that you live up here in the sticks. I should think with your looks you could get a job in the city."

"You mean Utica?"

"New York."

"No, I would not like that. No trees."

"You're crazy about trees?"

"Well, some trees. If there was a job in a place with a Norway maple in front of it, I would take it at once."

"A what in front of the place?"

"A Norway maple—*acer platanoides*. Do you know of a place that has one such?"

"Why uh . . . no. But I don't know much about trees. Is that a native species?"

"No, a European."

"Wouldn't another species do?"

"No; it must be that. I cannot explain. But, Mr. Wilcox, it would

It was just sawdust—but a peculiarly active and repulsive form of sawdust!

mean much to me." She rolled her large eyes meltingly at him.

Wilcox's morals began to assert themselves. He said stiffly: "I'm afraid I don't know what *I* could do for you."

"You could find a nice, clean place that has a job open, and a Norway maple growing in front of it. If you did, I would like you very, *very* much." Another roll of the optics.

At the second "very," Wilcox could fairly feel his morals tugging him toward the door. Of course, he, or rather his morals, may have been doing Miss Jones an injustice. But he didn't stay to investigate this melancholy redhead's passion for

Norway maples, or her definition of "very," either. He paused only long enough to assure Miss Jones that he'd let her know if he heard of anything. Then he passed out of the restaurant and out of this tale.

TO GET a proper perspective on the story, we must go back to 1824. In that year there landed in New York a dark, paunchy, dignified man who said he was August Rudli of Zurich, Switzerland. He was, he said, a member of an old Swiss banking family, and also related to the Wittelsbachs, so that he was about forty-third in line for the Bavarian throne. He had been a colonel under Napoleon—he had a medal to prove it—and finding the banking business too stuffy, had taken his share of the family fortune and come to America.

But in this sinful world men do not always tell the exact truth, and it must be recorded that Herr Rudli's story contained one or two inexactitudes. He was related neither to the Wittelsbachs nor to any family of bankers. He had seen no military service; the medal was a phony. He had been in the banking business, but not in the way he had said. He had risen by sheer merit to the post of cashier. Thereupon, on a dark and stormy night, he had walked off with all the assets that weren't securely nailed down.

As people were seldom if ever extradited across the Atlantic in those days, at least for embezzlement, Herr Rudli might have enjoyed the fruits of his enterprise for years, if he hadn't fallen in with an even slicker article. This article, one John A. Spooner, separated Rudli from most of his cash for a "country estate" consisting of several thousand acres of granite ridges, bog holes and black flies in the Adirondacks. Rudli spent most of the rest in having a road run in, a biggish house built, and gewgaws imported from Europe to furnish the house. Among the more puzzling importations were two young Norway maples, which were planted in front of the house. Rudli's tract was already covered by a dense mixed forest consisting partly of sugar maple, red maple and silver maple, the first of which grow at least as large and as fast as any European maple. But Rudli had his own ideas about being a country gentleman, and the planting of imported trees evidently formed part of them.

Rudli never learned how thoroughly he had been roodled. He died of pneumonia in the middle of the first winter he attempted to spend in his new house.

AFTER Rudli's death the tract went through various hands. Some of it ended up as the property of the International Paper Co.; some went to the State of New York; the piece on which Rudli's house had stood went to a man named Delahanty. After a century of neglect, all that could be seen of the house was a broad, low mound covered with leaf mold, from which one stone chimney stuck up. The clearing in which the house had stood and most of the road leading to it were completely grown up. Of the two Norway maples, one had died in infancy. The other was now a fine, big tree.

Delahanty, the elder, sold his pulpwood stumpage in 1903. Thirty-five years later Delahanty, the younger, sold the hardwood on the tract. In went the lumberjacks through the snow, and down came the beeches, birches and hard maples. Down, too, came Rudli's surviving Norway maple, mistaken for

a sugar maple, the "hard" maple of the lumberman.

In due course the two logs that had been cut from this tree arrived in the hot pond of Dan Pringle's sawmill at Gahato. The name of the village, by the way, is Mohawk for "log-in-the-water"; very appropriate for a sawmill town. In the spring they were hauled up the jacker chain and sawn into about nine hundred feet of one-inch boards. These were put in Pile No. 1027, which consisted of one-inch FAS hard maple. FAS—Firsts and Seconds—is the highest hardwood classification.

The following summer Pringle got a hardwood order from Hoyt, his wholesaler, that included twenty thousand feet of one-inch FAS hard maple. The yard crew loaded the top halves of Piles No. 1027 and 1040 into a box car. The foreman, Joe Larochelle, ordered them to transfer the remaining half of Pile 1027 to Pile 1040. So Henri Michod lowered himself from the hardwood tramway to the top of Pile No. 1027. He picked up a board and handed it to Olaf Bergen, who turned and plunked it on a lumber truck that stood on the tramway with its wheels chocked. Bergen took his pipe out long enough to spit—aiming between the tramway and the pile—steered the pipe back through the mossy curtain of yellow hair that hung from his upper lip, grabbed the next board, and so forth. When Michod had finished the topmost course of boards, he gathered up the stickers —the one-by-two's that keep the courses apart—piled them on the tramway, and went on to the next course.

That was all very well. But when Michod started on the fourth course, the pile began to sway. First it swayed east and west, then north and south, then with a circular motion, like a Japanese statesman on his night out. It also set up a dismal moaning and squeaking as boards and stickers rubbed together.

Olaf Bergen stared in childish wonder at this phenomenon. "Hey, Henri, what the Hold Jumping Judas you doing with that pile?"

"Me?" cried the harassed Michod. "I don't do nothing. It does it. Earthquake, maybe. I think I get the hell off." He jumped off the pile onto a lower one with a clatter.

"Can't be no earthquake," Bergen called down to him. "You don't see the other piles actin' up, do you?"

"No."

"Well, if it was an earthquake, the other piles would have swayed, too, wouldn't they? So there wasn't no earthquake. Stands to reason, don't it?"

"Yeah? Then what makes the pile sway?"

"Nothin'. An earthquake's the only thing that could, and there wasn't no earthquake. So the pile didn't sway. Now get back up and gimme some more boards."

"So the pile didn't sway, huh? *Les nuts*, Mr. Bergen. I know better. And, by damn, I don't get back up there."

"Aw, come on, Henri. Stands to reason it must have been your imagination."

"All right, you stand on the pile then. I take the tramway." Michod swarmed up onto the trestle. Bergen, looking confident, jumped down onto No. 1027.

But No. 1027 had its own ideas, if lumber piles can be said to have ideas. Whether this was an idea, or a reflex, or a mere tropism, the pile began to sway again. Bergen, staggering to keep his balance, perforce had to sway, too. And with each sway his china-blue eyes got bigger.

The motion was not a very unpleasant or difficult one; in fact it was rather like that of the deck of a ship in a stiff breeze. But that didn't calm Olaf Bergen any. The trouble was that this lumber pile was *not* the deck of a ship. Lumber piles don't, normally, act that way. A pile that does so is unnatural, perhaps unholy. Olaf Bergen wanted no part of such a pile; not even a splinter.

So he shrieked: "The damn thing's haunted!" and tumbled off even more quickly than Michod had done. There was a brief swishing of his work shoes through the weeds, and the lumber yards knew him no more, at least not that day.

Henri Michod sat down on the tramway and took out a pack of cigarettes. He would have to report this singular occurrence to Joe Larochelle. But that was no reason for not relaxing a little first.

Then he heard Larochelle's quick footsteps coming down the tramway, and put away his cigarettes. Nobody walked quite as fast as Larochelle. He always arrived places slightly out of breath, and when he talked his sentences fell over one another. By these means he created an illusion of being an intensely busy man, passionately devoted to his employer's interests. He was medium-sized, baldish, and snaggle-toothed. He trotted up and gasped: "Wh-where . . . where's Ole?"

"Ole?" replied Michod. "He's gone home."

"You mean to say that lousy guy went home without saying anything to me and here I've got three cars of grain-door board to get loaded in time for the noon freight?"

"That's it, Joe."

"Was he sick?"

"Maybe. He got kind of upset when this pile began to sway under him."

"Well, of all the lousy tricks! You wait here; I'll send Jean Camaret over from the pine tram. What the hell kind of a place does he think this is, anyhow?"—and Larochelle was off again.

Presently Jean Camaret appeared. He was older and even beefier than Henri Michod, who was pretty beefy himself. Between themselves they spoke Canuck French, which is not quite the same as French French. More than one Frenchman has indignantly denied that it is French at all.

Camaret got onto Pile No. 1027. Before he had time to do more, the pile began to sway again. Camaret looked up. "Is it that I am dizzy, or is it that this sacred pile shakes herself?"

"The pile shakes herself, I think. It is a thing most extraordinary. It is not the wind, and it is not the earthquake. But it makes nothing. Give me a board just the same."

Camaret was, through no desire of his own, giving a first-rate imitation of a reed in a gale. But anyone could see that his heart was not in the part. He was not suited to it. There was nothing reedlike about him. He spread his feet to brace himself, made a fumbling effort to pick up a board, then turned a large, red, joyless face up to Michod.

"I cannot move," he said. "This unhappy pile gives me the sickness of the sea. Aid me to mount, my old."

His old helped him onto the tramway. He sat down, put his head in his hands, and groaned like a soul that has just learned that its term in purgatory is to be several times as long as expected.

Michod grinned unsympathetically. At this rate he'd get a day's pay for doing no work at all. He

started to take out his cigarettes again, but Joe Larochelle bustled down the tramway. "Wh-what . . what's the matter with Jean? Is he sick or something?"

Camaret groaned again, more horribly. "I have the sick to the stomach. The pile goes *comme ci—comme ça.*"

"Whaddya mean the pile goes this way and that way? What the hell's the matter with you? Scared because a pile sways a little?"

"This pile is different. You get on and see."

"Huh! Never thought I'd see a grown man like you scared of a little pile. What the hell, I'm not scared —" And Larochelle hopped off the tramway. The pile began its rocking-chair act. Larochelle yelped and scrambled back on the trestle.

"Anybody can see that pile ain't safe!" he bawled. "Must be the foundation beams are gone all to hell. Why the hell didn't you tell me sooner, Henri? Want us to break our necks?"

Henri Michod knew better than to argue. He grinned cynically and shrugged.

Larochelle concluded: "Well, anyway, you guys go over and help on the pine tram. Come back here at one."

WHEN Camaret and Michod returned to Pile No. 1027 after the noon hour, they saw that Larochelle had tied it to the neighboring piles with a half-inch rope. He explained: "The foundation beams are O. K.; I don't see what the hell's wrong unless the supports are high in the middle so she's—whatcha call it?—unstable. But she ought to hold still with all this guying."

Neither yard worker showed any enthusiasm for getting back on the pile. Finally Larochelle shouted: "Damn it, Henri, you get on that pile or I'll put you on the soda tank!" So Michod got, albeit sullenly. Larochelle referred to the tank of preserving solution in which freshly sawn pine planks were dunked. In pulling boards out of this tank, you had to move quickly to keep the next board from hitting you, and the solution made your hands crack after a day. Larochelle's favorite method of settling arguments was to threaten to put a man on the disagreeable tank job out of his regular turn.

They loaded the truck, pushed it down to Pile No. 1040, and unloaded it. When this had been done twice, Larochelle put another man on the job, to stand on the edge of the pile and pass boards up. No. 1027 groaned and creaked a good deal, but the guying kept it from doing its hula.

The new man, Edward Gallivan, picked up a board, and handed it to Michod, who pased it up to Camaret. Gallivan had picked up another board, when the first board twisted itself out of Camaret's hands. It flew back down, landing on Gallivan's board. Thus Camaret found himself boardless, while Gallivan had two boards.

Now Edward Gallivan liked millyard work well enough, but not to the point of collecting hard-maple planks for the fun of it. He cried: "Hey, Frenchy, watch what you're doin'! You damn near took the head off me with that thing."

Camaret muttered something apologetic and looked puzzled. Michod passed the errant board up again. Again it twisted itself away from Camaret, and returned to the pile with a clatter.

Camaret looked down with an expression of perplexity, suspicion, reproach and growing alarm. That is, he would have looked that way if the

human face were capable of expressing so many emotions at once. "Henri," he said, "did you grab that board away from me?"

"Why would I go grabbing boards away from you? I got enough boards already."

"I don't ask that. Did you snatch her?"

"No, by damn, I didn't. I ain't no board-snatcher."

"Now, boys," said Gallivan, "we ain't getting nowheres arguin' like this. You do it over and I'll watch."

So Michod passed the board up a third time. When Camaret took it, it swung wildly and twisted like a live thing. Camaret released it to keep from being pulled off the tramway, and it floated gently back to the place from which Gallivan had picked it. "Saints preserve us!" cried Gallivan. "I don't like that."

Michod folded his arms triumphantly. "You satisfied, Jean? I didn't have nothing to do with that."

Camaret replied hollowly: "Me, I am satisfied. I am satisfied too much. I get the sick to the stomach when I think of that. You tell Joe I go. I go home, get drunk, beat my wife, forget all about these damn boards."

Joe Larochelle blew up when the state of affairs was explained to him. Ned Gallivan smiled paternally, and Henri Michod shrugged. Larochelle had recently turned in a certain credit slip for eight hundred feet of No. 1 Common Birch, of which the local customer had not returned all the allegedly unused lumber. Maybe it was a bona fide mistake; maybe Larochelle had not split the proceeds of the discrepancy with the customer. But Gallivan and Michod knew about the slip, and were pretty sure of their own positions in consequence.

Finally Larochelle yelled: "All right, all right! I'll show you how to handle these jumping boards. You wait here—" When he returned he carried a double-bitted ax. "Now," he said, "Henri, you hand a board to Ned."

When Gallivan took the board, it apparently tried to pull him off the trestle. Larochelle, standing beside him, smacked the board with the flat of the ax. It quivered a bit and subsided.

"Ouch!" said Gallivan. "You're making my hands sting."

"Never mind that, it's the way to handle 'em. I'm the guy who has to figure everything out—" Larochelle's expedient seemed to have cowed the boards, temporarily at least. They went up without protest.

Michod thought, that was just like the stupid, pretending that nothing was wrong. Anybody could see that here was something of the most extraordinary. That was the way of the world. The stupids like Larochelle had the authority, while the intelligents like himself—

This reverie was interrupted by another singular occurrence. Michod carelessly shot a board up to Gallivan when the latter was busy fishing his eating-tobacco out of his pants pocket. Gallivan made a one-handed grab and missed. It didn't much matter, as the board kept right on going. It did a graceful arc, and settled cozily into its appointed place on the truck.

"Hey!" yelled Larochelle. "Don't go throwing those boards, you're liable to hit somebody."

Michod kept silent, not wanting to disillusion the others about his strength and adroitness. Gallivan caught the next board; it hoisted him a foot into the air before he stopped it.

"What the hell are you trying to

do, Henri?" cried the justifiably surprised Gallivan.

It was all very well to get credit for the mill-yard equivalent of tossing the caber, or whatever that game is that Scotchmen play with telephone poles, but to be blamed for all the vagaries of these athletic boards was something else. So Michod spoke up: "I'm not trying to do nothing, by damn. I—" He was interrupted by finding his hands unexpectedly full of board. But the board didn't stay there. It ripped his mittens in its eagerness to get up into Gallivan's hands, and thence onto the truck.

Larochelle shrieked: "Stop it! Stop them!" As well try to stop a nestful of hornets by reading Jean Jacques Rousseau to them. All over the pile, boards were bouncing into Michod's uneager grasp, then flinging themselves up to Gallivan and onto the truck. The load grew by leaps and even a bound or two. When they stopped, the truck was piled dangerously high. The last board took time out to thwack Joe Larochelle in passing. The foreman toppled from the tramway. As he did so he grabbed Gallivan for support. Both landed on the unfortunate Michod with a great clatter.

They picked themselves up to see the truck moving down the track of its own accord. Larochelle, who among his very modest list of virtues certainly counted energy, scrambled back onto the tramway in pursuit. The truck stopped in front of No. 1040, and its load cascaded crashingly off.

"Hey, look down!" said Michod. The three men got down on their knees and peered over the edge of the trestle. A board had fallen off the truck during its trip, and gone down between the tramway and the piles. It was now crawling after the fashion of an inchworm through the weeds. Arriving at No. 1040, it began to hump itself up the pile's side. Now and then it would be jerked upward without visible effort on its part. Its motions were like those of a rather obtuse puppy whose owner is trying to teach it tricks, and putting it through them by *force majeure* when it doesn't get the idea. Finally it left the step-boards on the side of the pile, and swooped up onto the disorderly tangle on top of No. 1040.

Joe Larochelle did not acknowledge defeat easily. No matter how red-handed you caught him in a bit of grafting, he was as firm as an early Christian martyr and as plausible as a street map in his denials. But now he said: "It's too much for me. You boys can go home; I gotta see the boss."

JOE LAROCHELLE repaired to Pringle's office, which was downstairs in his home. He told his story.

Dan Pringle was a small, plump man with a large watch chain decorated with an incisor tooth of *cervus canadensis*—the wapiti. He asked: "You been drinking lately, Joe?"

"No, Mr. Pringle. I ain't touched a thing."

Pringle got up and sniffed. "Well; I guess maybe not. Do you suppose a union organizer was back of this?"

"No, there ain't been any around. I been watching for them."

"Did you look between the piles and under the tramways?"

"Sure, I looked everywhere."

"Well, maybe. They're apt to sneak in no matter how careful you are, you know. Suppose you come back after supper and we'll take a look at the fancy boards. And bring a flashlight. We'll look around for union organizers, just in case."

PRINGLE and Larochelle arrived at the lumber yard as the sun was slid-

"You cut down my tree," she pouted, "and unless you find me another I'll haunt these boards."

ing down behind Gahato Mountain, so-called. In the Adirondacks every hump that takes more than ten minutes to scale is a mountain by definition, just as in the West every trough-shaped depression, down which water has been known to run within the memory of man, is a river.

Pringle insisted on creeping around the piles with his flashlight as if he were playing gangsters and G-men. He was, he explained, hoping to surprise a lurking union organizer. At Pile No. 1040 Larochelle said: "That's her. See them boards lying in a heap on top?"

Pringle saw the boards. He also saw a young woman sitting on the edge of the pile, swinging her sandaled feet. Her green dress had ob-

viously seen better days. About her hair, the kindest comment would be that it looked "nonchalant" or "carefree." It had apparently been red, and had been singed off. It had grown out again, but was still black at the ends and presented a distressing aspect.

"Good evening," said the young woman. "You are Mr. Pringle, the owner of the sawmill, are you not?"

"Why—uh—maybe," said Pringle suspiciously. "Who— I mean what can I do for you?"

"Huh?" said a puzzled voice at his side. "What do you mean, Mr. Pringle?" Joe Larochelle was looking at him, ignoring the girl, whose feet were a few feet away on a level with his face.

"Why—I was talking—"

"You *are* the owner, Mr. Pringle? I have heard the men talking about you," said the girl.

"Just thinking out loud?" said Larochelle.

"Yes— I mean maybe," said the confused Pringle. "She just asked me—"

"Who's 'she'?" asked Larochelle.

"That young lady."

"What young lady?"

Pringle decided that his foreman was simply dithering, and asked the girl, "You're not a union organizer, are you?"

The girl and Larochelle answered simultaneously: "I don't know what that is. I don't think so." "Who *me?* Aw, come on, Mr. Pringle you oughta know I hate 'em as much as you—"

"Not you, Joe!" cried Pringle. "Not you! I was just asking her—"

Larochelle's patience, not a thing of tungsten carbide, began to wear thin. "And I been asking you who 'her' is?"

"How should I know? I've been trying to find out myself."

"I think we're kinda mixed up. Here you talk about some skirt and I ask who and you say you don't know. That don't make sense, does it?"

Pringle wiped his forehead.

The girl said: "I would like to see you, Mr. Pringle, only without this M'sieu' Larochelle."

"We'll see, miss," said Pringle.

Larochelle spoke: "Say, Mr. Pringle, are you feeling well? Damned if you don't sound like you was talking to somebody who ain't there."

Pringle began to feel like a rat in the hands of an experimental psychologist who is, with the best of motives, trying to drive it crazy. "Don't be ridiculous, Joe. I sound as though I were talking to somebody who *is* there."

"I know; that's just the trouble."

"What's the trouble?"

"There *ain't* anybody there, of course!"

THIS STATEMENT, despite its alarming implications, gave Pringle a feeling of relief. Theretofore, this maddening dispute had been like fighting blindfolded with broadswords at sixty paces. Now he had a solid point of disagreement. He said sharply: "Are you sure *you're* feeling well, Joe?"

"Sure, of course, I'm well."

"Do you, or don't you, see a girl in a green dress sitting on the edge of the pile?"

"No. I just said there ain't anybody there."

"Didn't ask you whether anybody *was* there, but whether you *saw* anybody there."

"Well, if there was anybody there I'd see 'em, wouldn't I? Makes sense, don't it?"

"We'll waive that."

"Wave what? This green dress I'm supposed to see that ain't there?"

Pringle danced distractedly on his short legs. "Never mind, never mind! Have you heard a woman's voice coming from that pile?"

"No, of course not. What gives you the idea—"

"All right, all right, that's what I wanted to know. You can run along home now. I'll do the rest of the investigating myself. No"—as Larochelle started to protest—"I mean that."

"Oh, all right. But look out the union organizers don't get you." Larochelle grinned maliciously and trotted off.

Pringle winced visibly at the last words, but bravely faced the pile.

"Now, young lady," he said grimly, "are you *sure* you're not a union organizer?"

"Would I know if I was, Mr. Pringle?"

"You bet you would. I guess you aren't one, maybe. More likely an hallucination."

"Mr. Pringle! I did not ask to see you so you could call me bad names."

"No offense meant. But something's very funny around here. Either Joe or I are seeing things."

"If you have good eyes, you always see things. What is wrong with that?"

"Nothing, when the things are there. What I'm trying to find out is, are you real or am I imagining you?"

"You see me, no?"

"Sure. But that doesn't prove you're real."

"What do I do to prove I am real?"

"I'm not just sure myself. You could put out your hand," he said doubtfully. The girl reached down, and Pringle touched her hand. "Feels real enough. But maybe I'm imagining the feel. How come Joe didn't see you?"

"I did not want him to."

"Oh, just like that, eh? You don't want him to, so he looks right through you."

"Naturally."

"It may be natural to you. But when I look at somebody I generally see him. Let's forget that question for a while. Let's not even think about it. If I'm not nuts already, I will be soon at this rate. Just what is all this funny business?"

"I don't think it is funny to have my home broken up."

"Huh?"

"You broke up my home."

"I broke up your home. I broke up your home. Young lady—What's your name, by the way?"

"Aceria."

"Miss Aceria, or Aceria something?"

"Just Aceria."

"Oh, well, skip it. I used to consider myself a pretty intelligent man. Not any parlor-pink intellectual, you understand, but a good, competent American businessman. But I'm not sure any more. Nothing seems to make sense. What in the name of the great horn spoon do you mean, I've broken up your home? Did I lead your husband astray, maybe?"

"Oh, not like that. Like *that!*" She pointed to the tangle of boards behind her. "That was my home."

"Those boards? Come on, don't try to tell me some man of mine tore your house down and sneaked the boards onto the pile."

"Well, yes and no. Those boards were my tree."

"YOUR *what?*" A subtle refrain began to run through Pringle's mind: "Wish I had an aspirin—wish I had an aspirin—wish I had an aspirin—"

"My tree. I lived in it."

"I suppose you'll say next you

were responsible for that commotion today?"

"I am afraid yes."

"Well." Others had testified to the occurrence of the commotion. Or had Pringle imagined that Joe Larochelle had told that story—No, no, no! He wasn't going to think about that any more. "What was the idea?"

"I wanted to keep my home together. First I tried to keep the men from moving the boards. When I could not, I hurried the last ones up to get them together again."

"What *are* you? Some kind of spook?"

"I am a sphendamniad. That is a kind of wood nymph. Some people would say dryad, but that is not just right. They are oak spirits. I am a maple spirit. A man brought my tree from Austria, more than a hundred years ago. Last winter your men cut my tree down. I could not stop them, because I was hibernating, I think you call it, and by the time I woke up it was too late. That is how my hair got burned, when the men burned the branches and tops. It has grown out, but I know it looks terrible. I cannot leave my home on weekdays to go to the hairdresser, for fear the men will move the boards."

"You mean those aren't real hard maple?" snapped Pringle with sudden alertness. He climbed the side of the pile with an agility remarkable in a man of his age and girth. He looked at the boards with his flashlight. "Yeah, the grain *isn't* quite the same. Let's see; if they fooled the grader . I guess maybe they can go out with the rest on Tuesday."

"You mean you are going to sell these boards?"

"Sure. Just got a big order from Hoyt."

"What will happen to them?"

"Dunno. They'll be made into desks and bureau drawers and things, maybe. Depends on who buys them from Hoyt."

"But you must not do that, Mr. Pringle! My home, it will be scattered. I will have no place to live."

"Can't you set up housekeeping in another tree?"

"I can only live in Norway maples, and there are no more around here."

"Well, do you want to buy them? I'll let you have them at eighty dollars a thousand, which is less than I could get in the open market."

"I have no money."

"Well then, they'll have to go out with the rest. Sorry if it inconveniences you, but the sawmill costs alone are over seven dollars a thousand, counting insurance and depreciation."

"I do not know about such things, Mr. Pringle. I know you will break up my home so I can never get it together again. You would not do that, yes? I would like you *so* much if you did not." She looked appealingly at him, a tear trickling down one cheek.

If she had done this earlier, while it was still light, it might have worked. But all Pringle could see of her face was a dim, pale oval in the darkness. So he snapped: "You bet I'd do that. This is business, young lady. If I let sentiment interfere with business, I'd have gone broke long ago. Anyway, I'm not convinced that you exist. So why should I give away lumber I paid good money for to somebody who's a mere hallucination, maybe?"

"You are a bad, wicked man. I will never let you send these boards away."

"Oh," he grinned through the

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dark. "It's to be a fight, huh? Nobody ever accused Dan Pringle of running away from a good, honest business fight. We'll see. Good night, Miss Aceria."

PRINGLE was as good as his word. Monday morning he called in Larochelle and told him to load the lumber in Pile No. 1040 that day, instead of Tuesday as planned.

Michod, Camaret, Gallivan and Bergen all looked solemn when they saw they were to work on No. 1040. But Larochelle forestalled any objections by mention of the soda tank. So they set up the rollers. These were objects that looked like iron ladders, except that on what would be the rungs were mounted steel sleeves rotating on ball bearings. The rollers were mounted end to end on sawhorses so that they could carry boards across the tramway and across the tops of the two low piles between the tramway and the railroad spur.

Fassler, the inspector, turned the first board over with the sharpened T-piece on the end of his flexible lumber rule and made a note on his tally sheet. Gallivan, wondering if he hadn't been several kinds of fool for taking the job on Pile No. 1040, picked up the board and gave it to Michod. Michod put it on the nearest roller and shoved. *Zing!* went the rolls and away went the board.

In the normal course of events the board should have continued the even tenor of its way to the box car, where Camaret and Bergen awaited it. Their mittens were outstretched to seize it, when it slowed down, stopped, and reversed its motion. *Zing!* went the rolls, but this time in reverse. Michod stared at it dumbly as it shot past under his nose, left the end of the line of rollers, and slammed down on the top of the pile.

Aceria had not been caught napping.

But Fassler knew nothing about Aceria, except for some vague talk, which he had discounted, about jumping boards. Since the tramway was between him and the box car, he could not see what had happened, and assumed that somebody had pushed the board back up the rollers. He said so, with embellishments. He was a very profane man, though a slight, stoop-shouldered, harmless-looking one. People liked to play jokes on him so that they could stand around and admire his profanity.

Gallivan grinned at him. "Hey, Archie, will you say some more? Sure, it's as good as an education for a man to listen to you."

But the others were not so amused. Camaret and Bergen came up from the car. Camaret said: "I begin to get the sick to the stomach again."

Bergen said: "I'm damned if I'll work in a yard that's full of spooks."

Michod cocked a skeptical eyebrow. "You don't believe in those things, Ole?"

"Well, not exactly. But there's a powerful lot of queer things you don't know about."

"All right. You argue. I take a rest." And Michod sat down to enjoy a smoke. The others explained to the incredulous Fassler. Finally, not knowing what else to do, they went back to work. Michod undertook to conduct the next board personally down to the box car. It went along reluctantly; just before they arrived it shot forward, in one door of the car and out the other into the weeds before Camaret and Bergen could stop it.

So Joe Larochelle presently found his workers sitting on the tramway and settling the affairs of the Universe. He yelled: "You get back there and load that stuff or, by jeepers, you can start looking for another job!"

Gallivan grinned. "Sure, now, wouldn't that be a terrible thing?" He lowered his voice. "And wouldn't it be terrible, Joe, if the boss found out about that credit slip you turned in for Jack Smeed?"

"I dunno what you're talking about," said Larochelle. "But, anyway, I guess there's some other stuff you can pile."

So nothing more was done to Pile No. 1040 that day. Larochelle, if he had a soul, wrestled with it mightily. He had definite orders from Pringle, but he couldn't adopt the usual method of enforcing them because of the delicate credit-slip situation. By Tuesday night he worked up enough courage to report to Pringle.

Pringle snapped: "Sounds like they're getting pretty damned independent. Maybe a union organizer got next to them, after all. Let's see. I'll think of something by tomorrow, maybe." Neither was altogether candid. Larochelle obviously couldn't explain why he couldn't get tougher with the yard crew, and Pringle couldn't explain about Aceria for fear of having people tap their foreheads. He wasn't too sure about his sanity himself. He thought of going down the line to Utica to be looked over, but he was afraid to do that for fear the doctor *would* find something wrong with his clockwork.

WEDNESDAY morning Pringle wandered down to the sawmill. There he saw something that filled him with dismay and apprehension. It was nothing more than an elderly, dried-up man looking at a box car standing on the end of the spur. That seems like a harmless enough combination. But the elderly man

was the New York Central freight agent, and the car was one that had arrived with a carload of lime some months before. Pringle hadn't had any place to store the lime, hadn't wanted to build a shed, and hadn't wanted to pay demurrage on the car. So he had had the car jacked down to the end of the spur and hidden with brush. There it had stood, serving as free storage space while Pringle unloaded at his leisure and the Central wondered vaguely what had become of their car. Now the camouflage had been removed.

"We been wondering where that car was," accused Adams, the agent.

"I guess maybe it just slipped my mind," replied Pringle lamely.

"Mebbe. Looks like you owe us about three months' demurrage. I'll get the bill out fust thing tomorra." And Adams walked off uncompromisingly.

Later, Pringle grated to Larochelle: "If I find who took that brush away, I'll kill the—"

When Larochelle departed, a woman's voice said: "I took the branches away from the car, Mr. Pringle." There she was, standing between a couple of piles.

"You—" sputtered Pringle. He got a grip on himself. "I suppose maybe you think you're smart, young lady?"

"Oh, but I *know* I am smart," she replied innocently. "I thought out that you wanted that car hidden all by myself."

"Well, if you think it's going to make any difference about those boards, you can change your idea. They're going in spite of hell or high water."

"Yes? We will see, as you said that night." And she vanished.

Pringle yelled after Larochelle: "Hey, Joe! Spot a car for No. 1040 right away. If the hardwood gang don't want to work on it, get some men from the pine gang." He muttered to himself: "I'll show this wood spook! Thinks she can scare me—"

But the men from the pine gang fared no better than the hardwood gang. They fared rather worse, in fact. The boards slewed crosswise on the rollers, jumped off the pile, paddled the men, and finally hit one man, Dennis Ahearn, over the head. He required two stitches in his scalp, and there were no more attempts to load the car that day.

As Ahearn himself explained: "It may be the spooks, or it may be the wood, or it may be the sap runnin', but the divil himself won't get me to touch another of them damn live boards. What you need, Misther Pringle, is a crew of lion tamers."

Pringle was angry enough over his failure to get the car loaded. But he was a shrewd man; he wouldn't have lasted as long as he had in the precarious Adirondack lumber business otherwise. He suspected that Aceria would try some devilment or other in retaliation for his latest attempt to load the car. Maybe there would be an accident in the mill—so he ordered extra guard rails installed around the saws. Or, he thought, he might find some morning that all the lumber trucks were at the bottom of the Moose River. True, they weighed over three hundred pounds apiece, but he wasn't taking any chances with Aceria's supernatural powers, whatever they were. So he hired some of the workers overtime as night watchmen.

But Aceria was not exactly stupid, either. Uninformed, perhaps, as a result of living in the woods for so many centuries, but she learned quickly. So her next attack was in

a quarter that Pringle had not thought of.

Mrs. Pringle, a waspish woman, was due back at Pringle's home from a visit to some relatives. There was not much pleasurable anticipation of the reunion on either side. The corrosive effect of Helen Pringle's disposition, applied over a period of thirty years, had seen to that. But whatever Helen Pringle expected, she did not expect to find a comely young woman sitting at *her* dressing table, in *her* bedroom, calmly drying a head of freshly shampooed carroty-red hair.

Aceria looked up with a quick smile at Mrs. Pringle's gasp. "Yes?" she said politely.

Mrs. Pringle's mouth moved soundlessly. Then she said: "Gug."

"I'm sorry."

"You . you . . what . . what are you doing in my room?" Cold print does less than justice to the struggle with which these words came out. It was the first time since she had been five years old that words had failed—or almost failed—Mrs. Pringle. But then, the fact that Aceria was not wearing her green dress might have had something to do with it.

Aceria, still polite, remarked: "Your room? Oh, *I* see, you are Mrs. Pringle! This is embarrassing. It was stupid of Danny not to send me away before you came back, no? But if you will leave me for a minute, I will be gone like a flash."

Thus it came to pass that Pringle found the reunion more exciting, if no more pleasant, than he had expected. Helen descended on him and demanded to know, in a voice like a band saw going through a twenty-four-inch pine log—with knots in it—who that creature was, and didn't he have sense enough to know that nobody would want an old fool like him for anything but his money, and if he had to make a fool of him-

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self couldn't he have the decency to keep his follies out of his wife's sight, and it was a good thing she hadn't unpacked because she was leaving forthwith. Which she did.

Through this tirade Pringle was merely bewildered until the end. As Helen slammed the door behind her he saw the light and dashed upstairs. There was nobody there, of course.

DAN PRINGLE started for the mill intending to denounce Aceria up one side and down the other. But he cooled off on the way. He began to grin, and arrived feeling like a triumphal procession, if one man walking along a road can be called a procession.

He looked around to see that nobody was within hearing, and called softly: "Aceria!"

There she was, between two piles. Pringle accused: "I suppose it was you who appeared to my wife just now?"

"I am afraid yes. I do not like to interfere in the affairs of mortals. But I had to teach you not to try to move my boards."

Pringle grinned: "That's O. K., little lady. Don't give it a thought. You did me a favor. If I can count on my wife staying away awhile, maybe I can really enjoy life. So better not try any more stunts, or they're liable to backfire."

"You are still determined to break up my home?"

"Yep. Might have gotten softhearted if you hadn't pulled all these stunts. But now that lumber's going out if it's the last thing I do."

"I warn you, Mr. Pringle. I have some more stunts, as you call them."

"Such as?"

"You will see."

PRINGLE'S pride—at least, the quality that his competitors called his orneriness—prevented him from giving in. He couldn't let things go on as they were; the turmoil at the mill was costing him money every day, and he operated on a slim margin of profit. So next day he called all his mill workers together. They assembled in a silence made obtrusive by the lack of the band saw's shriek. Pringle called for volunteers for a risky job.

Those who hadn't experienced the athletic boards had heard about them, and were not too anxious to learn more firsthand. But Pringle offered time and a half, and they had to eat. Twenty-one responded. Pringle had decided against the use of rollers. Most of the gang would simply sit on Pile No. 1040 to hold the boards down, and four men would carry each board across the intervening piles to the box car.

The boards tugged and wiggled a bit, first, but Larochelle hit them with his ax and they went along. All went well until the car had been partly filled. Then there was an outbreak of yells from the car. Seconds later Michod and a man named Chisholm popped out of it, scrambled up the nearest pile to the tramway, and raced along the trestle. After them flew a short length of board. It swung this way and that, exactly as if somebody were chasing the two men and trying to hit them with it.

Pringle knew very well who was on the rear end of that piece of board. But he couldn't think of anything to do. While he watched, the board dropped lifeless to the tramway. Then there was a mighty clatter from the car, and most of the load of one-inch FAS maple spilled out the open car door on the side away from the piles. The boards, instead of being nice and rigid, like respectable maple planks, were writhing like

a nestful of loathsome larvae. As they flopped out onto the cinders, they bent into semicircles like bows, then straightened out with a snap and soared off toward the woods.

"After 'em!" yelled Pringle. "You, Joe! Two bits a board for every one that's brought back!" And he scrambled down and set out after his lumber as fast as his short legs would carry him. Larochelle followed. The crew's nerves, already shaken by the sight of the unnatural pursuit of Michod and Chisholm, were now completely demoralized. But a few men followed Pringle and Larochelle.

They ran and they ran, tripping over logs and falling into brooks. Eventually Aceria ran out of ectoplasm, or something, and the boards ceased their bounding flight. They were gathered up in armfuls and brought back. They were piled on No. 1040 again. The men flatly refused to enter the box car with them, where there would be no room to dodge. It took all Pringle's authority and gifts of leadership to get them to go back to work at all; the scream of the saw did not ring out over hill and pond again until after the noon hour.

AFTER LUNCH Pringle hopped about the mill yard nervously, awaiting the counterattack which he was sure was coming. It came soon enough. A mill like Pringle's, that is not equipped for turning out little things like chessmen, accumulates a vast amount of waste. Some of the slabs and edgings can be used as boiler fuel; some can be sold locally as firewood. But there is a surplus, and also a lot of useless sawdust. On the edge of the mill yard stood a pile of sawdust twenty feet high, waiting to be fed into the waste burner, a huge sheet-iron incinerator.

Presently this pile of sawdust did a curious thing. It swirled up into a whirling top-shaped cloud, as if a whirlwind had settled on its apex. The cloud grew until there was no more sawdust on the ground, and the cloud was as big as a house. Then it swooped hither and thither about the yard. It hid the workers from each other and stung their faces. They were not encouraged when one of them pointed out that, while the cloud itself seemed to be borne on a miniature tornado, the far-off trees stood stiff in still air. They stampeded, yelling, into the sawmill. The engineer, hearing the tumult, prudently shut down the engine, and again the band saw, edging, trimming and slashing saws fell silent. Nobody else was silent. Pringle, rubbing sawdust out of his bloodshot eyes, couldn't make himself heard at all.

The cloud made a couple of tentative rushes at the mill. But Aceria's powers apparently weren't equal to getting it in a lot of separate doors and windows and re-forming it inside. It hovered, teetering and swooshing menacingly, about the yard.

Lots of people did not love Dan Pringle. But they admitted that he had what it takes. He got the sneezing and blaspheming Larochelle and Fassler aside, and sent them on an errand. They went out and ran to Fassler's car. The cloud swooped after them, but they jumped in and cranked up the windows, and off they went.

When they came back they had two boxes full of colored sunglasses with little metal shields that made passable goggles out of them. Fassler said: "That's all there are of these things around here. We went clear up to Old Forge and cleaned out the stores. And my car stopped just before we got back. Sawdust in

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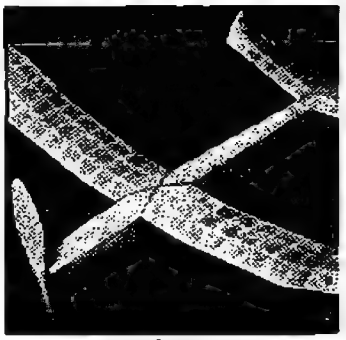

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the carburetor." He said some other things that would not go in print in a family magazine.

Pringle yelled for attention. He put on a pair of the goggles, tied a handkerchief over the lower part of his face, turned up his shirt collar, pulled his hat down over his ears, and said: "Now, if you guys have got any guts, you'll do like me and go out there and get back to work. The sawdust can't hurt you. I'm going out if I have to load the damn cars myself. Who's with me? Time and a half as long as that cloud's around."

Nobody said anything for a minute. Then Edward Gallivan mumbled something and put on a pair of goggles. Most of the others did likewise. They were, after all, a strong, tough lot, and the sight of their fat and aging boss preparing to face the cloud alone may have shamed them.

So, masked and goggled, they went back down the tramways, clutching at the piles for support as the whirlwind buffeted them and the sawdust stung every exposed inch of skin. Pringle grinned behind his handkerchief as he watched them get slowly on with their work, while Aceria's top shrieked about their ears. So, the wood spook still thought she could lick him? If this was her last stunt, he'd won, by jeepers. Or at least it was still a draw.

But it was not Aceria's last stunt. The cloud rose up and up until it looked no bigger than a marble. Everybody thought it was leaving for good, though they continued to glance up nervously at it.

Then it started down again. As it came near they saw that it was a lot smaller and more opaque than when it had gone up. As it approached it resolved itself into something that might be imagined by a paleontologist with the D. T.'s. It

looked somewhat like a pterodactyl, somewhat like an octopus, and somewhat like Fafner in "Siegfried." It had huge batlike wings and six long tentacular limbs with hands on their ends.

The shouts that had sounded on previous occasions about the yard were but as the chirp of canaries compared with the yells that now arose. As it glided over the yard, workers, foreman, inspector, everybody went away. They went in straight radial lines, like droplets of mercury when a gob falls on a table top, only much faster. They jumped fences and waded neck-deep across the Moose River. Those inside the mill looked out to see what was up. They saw, and they went, too.

Pringle danced on the tramway. "Come back!" he screamed. "It can't hurt you! It's only sawdust! Look!" The monster was bobbing up and down in front of him, moving its horrid yellow jaws. He strode up to it and punched it. His fist went right through the sawdust, which swirled out in little puffs around his wrist. The hole made by his fist closed up as soon as he drew his arm back. For it was, as he surmised, merely the same cloud of animated sawdust, somewhat condensed, and molded into this horrifying form. "Look here! It's not a real thing at all! Come on back!" He passed his hand right through one of its groping limbs, which joined together again immediately.

But there was nobody to appreciate this display of superhuman nerve. Across the river, Pringle could see the rear elevation of a couple of small figures in drab work clothes, getting smaller every minute. As he watched, they disappeared into the forest. The form floated low over the site of the sawdust pile and collapsed. The pile was back where it had been, and Pringle was alone.

The thing that perhaps annoyed Pringle the most was that this time the engineer had run off without shutting down the engine, so that all the saws were whirling merrily in the empty mill. Pringle had to go down and turn the valve himself.

It was almost dark when Pringle and Larochelle appeared at the sawmill. They looked odd. Pringle was wearing, among other things, a catcher's mask and chest protector. Larochelle wore an old football helmet, several sweaters, and a lumberyard worker's heavy leather apron. Pringle carried a flashlight, Larochelle a five-gallon can of kerosene and a gasoline blowtorch.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Pringle?" asked Aceria. She was sitting on No. 1040. Larochelle had gone off to start the water pump and uncoil the fire hose.

"Going to have a little fire."

"You are going to burn my home?"

"Maybe?"

"Won't you burn up the whole yard?"

"Not if we can help it. We're going to wet down the neighboring piles first. It's taking a chance, but what the hell."

"Why are you so determined to destroy my home?"

"Because, damn it," Pringle's voice rose, "I've had all I can stand of this business. It's cost me a hundred times the value of those boards. But I won't give in to you, see? You won't let me load the boards. O. K., they're no good to me. So I might as well burn 'em up and end this nonsense for good. And you can't stop me. Your boards are tied down so you can't crawl inside 'em and animate 'em. Joe and I are protected,

so it won't do you any good to get rough with us. And your sawdust monsters won't have a chance against this blowtorch."

Aceria was silent for a while. The only sounds were the hum of insects, the slap of Pringle's hand as he hit a punkie on his cheek, the whir of an automobile on the State highway, and Joe Larochelle's distant footsteps.

Then she said: "I do not think you will burn my home, Mr. Pringle."

"Who's going to stop me?"

"I am. You were very clever and very brave about facing my magics, no? And now you say, 'Ho-ho, I have beaten all Aceria's tricks.'"

"Yep." Pringle had been making a heap of edgings and bark, well away from the pile. A loud swish in the dark showed that Joe had begun his wetting down. "Now, Joe," Pringle called, "you catch the other end of this rope. We want to tighten up on the pile as soon as we pull a couple of boards out, so the rest can't get loose."

"O. K., Mr. Pringle. Here goes." There were unclassifiable sounds in the semidark as the two men moved around the pile, making sure that their enterprise would suffer neither from spreading of the flames nor unwonted activity on the part of the boards.

"Very clever," continued Aceria, "but I should have remembered sooner that it is not always the most complicated magic that is most effective."

"Uh," said Pringle. He splashed kerosene over his pile of kindling and lighted it. It flared up at once into a big, cheerful flame. "No wind," said Pringle, "so I guess she's safe enough. All right, Joe, let's haul the first board out."

Aceria seemed not to mind being ignored so pointedly. As Pringle and Larochelle laid hands on the board, she said: "You were only so-so afraid of the boards when I went into them and made them alive, no? And you stood up to my monster. But there is something you are more afraid of than the boards or the monsters."

Pringle just grinned. "Is there? All right, Joe, heave! Don't pay any attention if I seem to be talking to myself."

"Yes. Union organizers," said Aceria.

"Huh?" Pringle stopped pulling on the board.

"Yes. You would like it, no, if *I* organized your men?"

Pringle's mouth dropped open.

"I could do it. I have been listening to them talk, and I know something about unions. And you know me. I appear, I disappear. You could not keep me away, like you do those men from the A. F. L. and the C. I. O. Oh, I would have a nice revenge for the burning of my home."

For the space of thirty seconds there was no sound but the breathing of the two men and the crackle of the flames. When Pringle made a noise, it was a ghastly strangling sound, like the death rattle of a man dying of thirst in the desert.

"You—" he said. And again, "You—"

"You sick, Mr. Pringle?" asked Larochelle.

"No," said Pringle, "I'm dying."

"Well?" spoke Aceria.

Pringle sat down heavily in the muck, took off his wire mask, and buried his face in his hands. "Go away, Joe," he said, and would listen to no remonstrances from the alarmed Larochelle.

Pringle said: "You win. What

do you want me to do with the damn boards? We can't just leave 'em sit here until they rot."

"I would like them put in some nice dry place. I do not mind having them sold, if they are kept together until I can find another tree of the right kind."

"Let's see," said Pringle. "Earl Delacroix needs a new dance floor in his joint. But Earl's so tight he'll wait till somebody falls through the old one. Maybe if I offered him the boards at half price—or even a quarter—"

So it came to pass that, three weeks later, Earl Delacroix surprised those who knew his penurious habits by installing a new dance floor in The Pines. He surprised them somewhat less by hiring a luscious red-haired girl as hostess. He himself was not too pleased over that innovation. But Pringle had brought the girl in personally, and given her the strongest recommendation. Delacroix's mental eyebrows had gone up a bit. Hadn't Pringle's wife left him a while before? Oh, well, it was none of his business. If Pringle, who owned most of the town, wanted a —friend—employed, it was a good idea to employ the friend, without asking too many questions.

Delacroix had been particularly intrigued when the girl gave her name as Aceria; then, when he asked her full name, a whispered consultation between the girl and Pringle produced the surname of Jones. Jones, eh? Heh, heh.

Since then Aceria has worked at The Pines. For appearance's sake she has a room in the boarding house next door. But its bed is never slept in. Her landlady doesn't know that every night Aceria returns to the restaurant. It is dark then, and nobody is there to see her do whatever she does to merge herself with the floor boards. Probably she just fades out of sight. On these nocturnal trips she always wears her old green dress. Or rather, it was green, but with the coming of fall it gradually turned a rich orange-yellow.

She dances divinely, and the local boys like her, but find her a little odd. For instance, sooner or later she asks every acquaintance whether he knows of a place where a Norway maple grows. She is still asking, and if you know of one I'm sure she'd be grateful if you would inform her—

THE END.

WATCH THAT WINDOW!

by L. JOE FOHN

● The owner wanted him to live in the house—which seemed to be occupied by ghosts, and a girl who chased them with a Flit-gun full of ghost-layer!

URGED on by an empty stomach, he approached the unpainted house that faced the park. He walked past the gallery that half-mooned the gabled, bay-windowed structure, and knocked at the rear door.

When no one answered, he glanced across the weed-grown waste to the only other house that rose selfishly on the block. Green shutters were bright against the spotless white walls. Someone lived there for curtains waved in upstairs windows.

He moved dubiously through weeds that flowed rearward from the street to a reed-bordered pond. A sudden squawk startled him. He saw the water roil furiously. A mud hen thrummed into the air.

"Gosh!" said the man. "Some fish!"

At the neat house he knocked lightly, impressed by the flat, green lawn, geometrical flower beds, and hedges pruned exactly. The door jerked open.

"Well? What is it?"

The woman was stout, thin-lipped, and her eyes squinted.

"Hello," he said. "I'll chop your weeds for a meal."

"There are proper places downtown to feed such as you," she snapped.

"No, ma'am," he smiled. "I'll work if you'll let me. I'm from the valley oil fields. I'm broke because I lost in a poker game."

"Keep your troubles! Now get out of here or I'll call the police!"

With that, she slammed the door. The man grimaced, shrugged. In the silence he heard voices within the house.

"Who was that, Anna?"

"Oh, just some tramp. Said we had weeds! Imagine!"

"A tramp? Where is he?"

There was an eagerness in the masculine voice that made the hungry man hesitate. The door opened and a man in a smoking jacket stepped out. He was heavily jowled and his nose was pointed. A paunch made him seem even more squat.

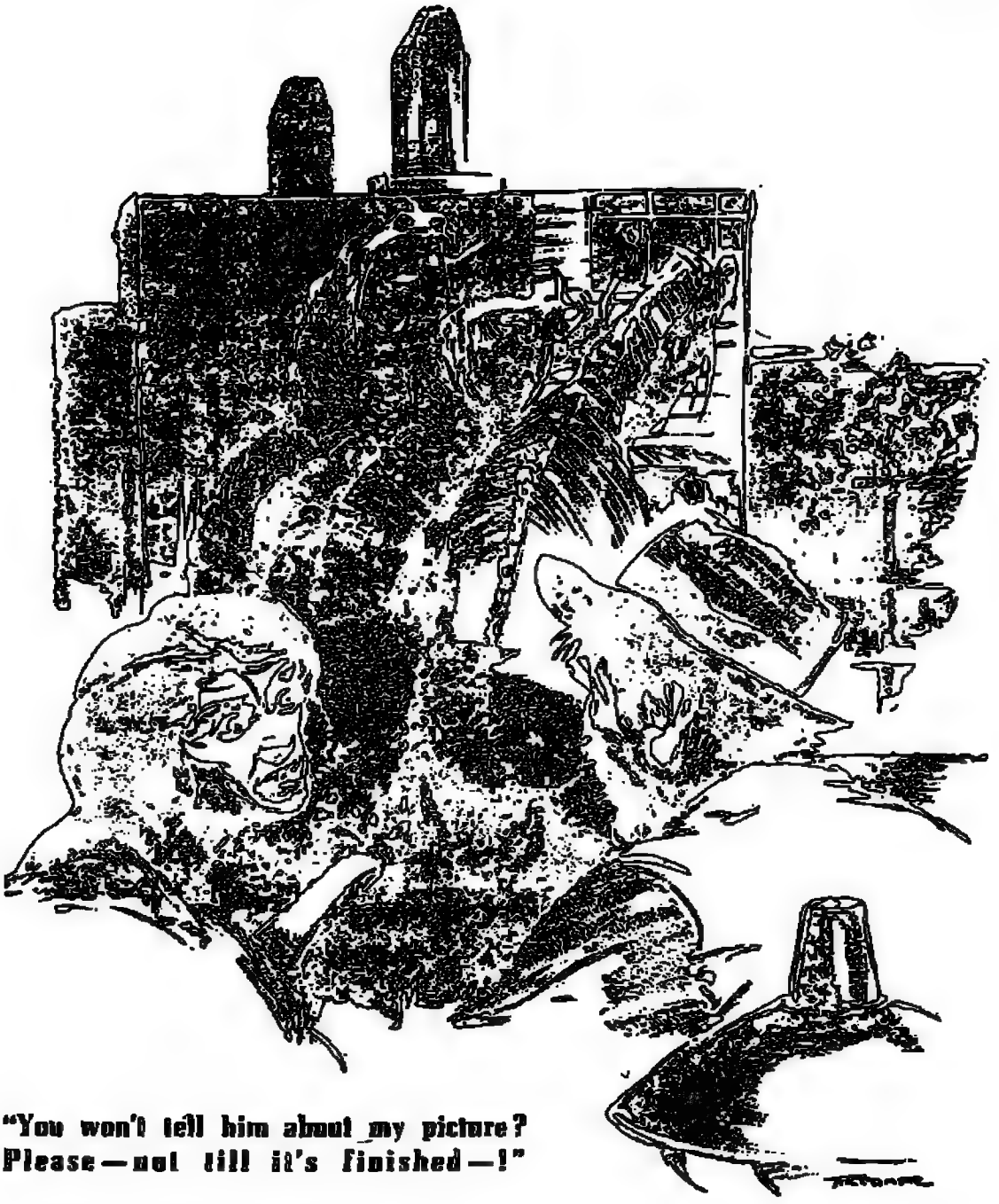
"Hey, you!"

The man from the valley returned slowly, warily. The squat man motioned and walked down the cement sidewalk toward the garage. At a safe distance from the house he stopped, thrust hands into tight trousers pockets, and puckered lips at the stranger.

"Want a real job?"

"Name it."

"Well." The pudgy man gazed swiftly about. Seconds passed as he pushed gross lips in and out. "Well. I want somebody to boss a gang of



"You won't tell him about my picture? Please—not till it's finished—!"

workers. Can you do it?"

"Easy. What's the pay?"

"Thirty-five dollars. The job won't be ready for three or four days."

"And I go hungry until then?"

"That's all right. You stay in that house over there. I'll see that you get fed."

The man from the valley scratched his head, suspicion in his eyes. "Sounds kind of haywire. But—all right. I'll need tobacco, matches and bedding."

"You," snapped the pudgy man, "will get a flashlight. That's all. If you can't take care of yourself, I don't want you! Is that plain?"

"O. K. O. K. But why do I get a flashlight?"

"So you won't burn the place down." He spoke over his shoulder as he walked away. "Wait here. I'll get the stuff."

The hungry man frowned from the sky back to the ground. He shook his head at his good fortune. Would anyone, he mused, give an unknown tramp a responsible job? He shrugged. There was nothing for him to lose. And if the job lasted two weeks, he'd have enough money to reach home.

"Here!" The squat man sounded as if he were calling a dog. He held out a flashlight and one lonely sandwich.

"Say." The young fellow was slow in accepting the articles. "What sort of work—"

"You'll know later. Stay in that house where I can reach you." With that curt dismissal, the door closed.

THE HUNGRY MAN walked back through the weeds to the old, bay-windowed house before eating. Once, while he strode along, he lifted the sandwich to hurl it away, then thought better of it. His thoughts were not charitable concerning his benefactor.

Later, after the last crumb was gone, he sprawled upon the unpainted steps and rolled a cigarette. The house was quiet and comfortable about him. It seemed far more friendly than the one beyond the weeds.

A low sun brought long shadows and that odd, sound-muffled effect that ends some summer days. A block away the streets were crowded with houses where muted calls of children mingled with faraway barks of dogs.

Measured footsteps that approached interrupted his doze. It was an old-timer with white hair and beard and friendly blue eyes.

"Good evening, friend," said the oldster. "Looks like pleasant weather."

"It is that," agreed the young man. "Sit down and rest."

"Don't mind if I do." The old-timer gazed quizzically from his host to the house. "I don't reckon you're staying here."

"Why not? It's a pretty nice old house."

"Oh, the house is all right. But Gus Banker ain't. And Pop Bennett, that's me, told him so. He lives over yonder."

"I met him," wryly answered the young man. Then he remembered the lone sandwich and his suspicions. "Mr. Bennett, would Gus Banker pay anyone thirty-five dollars a week for work?"

"*Heh-heh.* That's a good one! Boy, that rascal only paid five dollars for murder. What's your name?"

"Arthur Trice. But were you joking about that five-dollar murder?"

"It's kind of a windy story, Trice. You see, his old maid sister once owned this house. She kept boarders. One time she almost lost the house, but the boarders got together, scraped up enough money and lent it to her."

"Say! That was swell!"

"She was a mighty fine woman, Trice. Later, she became fairly well-to-do. Owned all this block. I think a sister left her the money. Gus Banker got some, too. When she died, her will said the boarders could stay here rent free as long as they liked."

"What about the murder?"

"I'm getting to it, lad. If the house became vacant, all this block was to become Gus Banker's. Well, they all left for one reason or another. Banker even bought off some. Then came the time that only one tenant remained."

"Oh-h-h, I begin to see."

"Gus Banker is a ornery devil. He started talk about the house being haunted. Then he hired a man for five dollars to scare the tenant out."

The old man stopped, gazed across the weeds at the other house, and shook his head.

"What happened, Mr. Bennett?"

"Next day the tenant was found dead. Heart failure. Oh, there was a big stink, right enough, but Gus Banker got off with a whole skin."

"He looks the type," growled Trice.

"Yip. But he ain't happy any more."

Trice saw the wise old eyes crinkle up. The old fellow chuckled. "No, sir. Not happy any more."

"His conscience?" hazarded Trice.

"Conscience? *Heh-heh.* It's ghosts."

With a frown, Trice glanced over his shoulder at the cobwebbed glass of the front door. He was thinking of Banker's reputation, the haywire promise of a job, the demand that he, Trice, sleep in this house. Self-interest made him alert.

"What do you mean, ghosts?"

"Banker started it," grinned the old-timer. "People just picked it up. They been telling that the house is haunted, so now Mrs. Banker sleeps with the lights on. Every once in a while, at night, you can hear her yell, 'Gus! Watch that window!' The old witch."

"So I'm a sucker!" scowled Trice. "Banker plans to pay me three sandwiches a day to prove this house isn't haunted."

Mr. Bennett stood up, carefully brushed his trousers, then tensed. Suddenly Trice was struck by the change in the old fellow's face. The kindness drained away, to be replaced by round-eyed malignancy. He followed Mr. Bennett's glare and saw Gus Banker out on the trim lawn, staring across at them.

The old man never moved until Banker stepped back inside. Mr. Bennett then smiled apologetically at Trice.

"Getting dark. I better be on my way."

"Thanks for dropping by," said Trice. "By the way, I wonder if it's safe to drink from that little lake back there?"

The old man shook his head. "I

wouldn't, son. It's mineral water."

"With fish in it?"

"Nary a fish. Better believe me, son."

Trice remembered the squawking mud hen, the roiling water. However, he saw no reason to argue with the old man.

"O. K.," he said. "I won't go fishing, then."

"That's good. So long, lad. It was a nice chat."

POP BENNETT walked into the heavy dusk. The slow, steady footsteps seemed suddenly to die. Trice frowned, peered down the walk, but darkness blocked his vision. He shrugged uneasily, then smiled.

"Bats!" he said. "First thing I know, I'll meet old Bloody Bones himself."

It was quite dark as he entered the unlocked house. His flashlight washed up and down a long hall. Near the front, a stairway right-angled into gloomy blackness. Where chandeliers had been, now hung streamers of dust-laden webs. The house seemed ancient and brittle. It made Trice feel as though he walked within a mummy.

He explored through the downstairs rooms, the long dining-room, and ended in the kitchen. Here some one had removed a wall cabinet, exposing wallpaper that, in contrast to the rest, had a repugnant purity.

Suddenly he stiffened. A faint scraping was audible. Trice swung the light back and forth. He wished that he had more light. That, and other thoughts came swiftly. It wouldn't be pleasant to sleep with rats running over him.

Then he saw a door on one side. Noiseless steps took him across the kitchen. As he opened the door, the beam of light flashed about. Steps led down into a shallow cellar. Through a window, high and barred, shone a lonely star.

As if from nowhere came a faint thud.

Trice stiffened, then jerked around as someone said, "Doggonit!" He had the courage to turn off the light and wait in the deep darkness. That voice had belonged to a woman.

When uneasy seconds brought nothing but added layers of blackness, Trice scowled, turned on the flash and started down the hall. Someone was in the house, perhaps upstairs.

He mounted cautiously. One hand covered the light so that only a meager streak reached out ahead. An occasional step creaked, but the loudest noise in that old house seemed to be his breathing.

Trice reached the upper landing. As he glanced down the hall toward the rear, he saw light streaming through a partly opened door. He smiled wryly and stepped forward. If anyone were due for a fright, it wouldn't be he.

At the door, he hesitated. If he knocked, it might be the signal for an attack. Someone, frightened, might shoot first and look afterward. With hands slightly nervous, he pushed gently against the door, worried that it might protest loudly. It didn't. He drew a deep breath.

Trice stepped within.

THE ROOM was neatly furnished, clean, and on the floor was a rug. A large china lamp with a tall chimney gave illumination from a table piled with books, magazines, and tubes of paint. In one corner was a bed, the covers thrown back.

And a young woman sat before an easel, her back to Trice. It seemed that she gazed out of the window toward Gus Banker's house which now blazed with light.

"Hello," said Trice.

The slim woman leaped. The chair turned over with a bang. Her hands swooped down and brought up an insect spray gun. Although her black eyes were large, startled, evident courage was there.

"Go on!" she commanded. "Vanish!"

"Shucks, I'm no ghost, lady."

"You said that before! You're all alike! Now will you stop this nonsense?"

She had a broad, low forehead, and black hair in which a streak of white licked backward. A dimpled chin made her face even more elfish.

There was a vaguely familiar aroma in the room. Trice sniffed questingly. Then he noticed green things hanging like curtains across both windows.

"What in the world is that?"

"You should ask!" retorted the woman.

"But what is it? Smells like onions."

"It's garlic and you know it! It's kept out the others." She gave Trice a closer glance. Her face became troubled. "Why, you're not the same one!"

"No, ma'am," he grinned. "I'm a greenhorn at this haunting business."

"Greenhorn?"

"Yes, ma'am. That vanishing stuff is hard."

"Why, that's awful! I mean . Oh, why don't you go away? Please."

"Do you live here?" puzzled Trice. "Gus Banker—"

"I know," she said wearily. "He's trying to run me out."

"No-o-o," disagreed Trice. "I don't think he knows you're here. What's your name?"

"Nellie. And he *does* know I'm here." She backed over to the unkempt bed and sat down. Nellie

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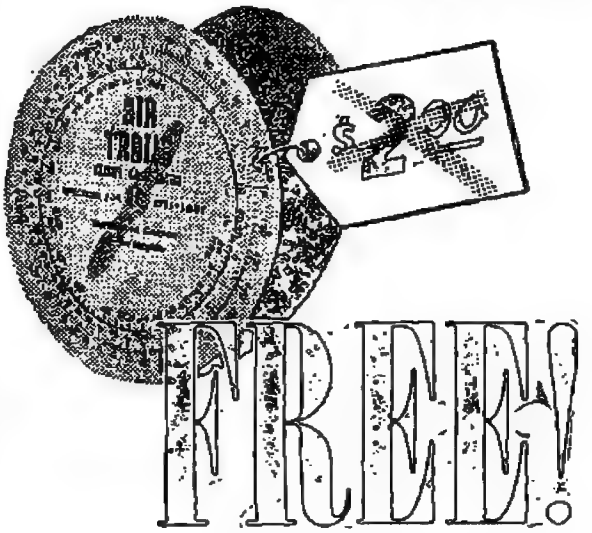

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held to the spray gun. She sighed in a troubled sort of way. "You see, we're having a fight."

Trice rolled a cigarette. "Well? I'm listening."

"He's trying to scare me out and I'm trying to scare him out."

"Suppose you win?" smiled Trice. "Then what?"

"I thought all you queer creatures knew about it. Don't you?" When Trice shook his head, she continued. "He's living on land that belongs to a dead sister. If he moves, the land, this whole block, goes to an orphanage."

"Now it makes sense. And if you move?"

"I won't!" she said vehemently. "But I just dare him to stay until I finish my picture."

"Then what?"

"He'll wish he had moved!"

Trice cast a curious glance at the easel. "Is that the picture?"

He took a step toward it. She arose swiftly and aimed the spray gun.

"Don't move!" she warned.

Trice frowned at the instrument, at the glass bowl on the bottom. It appeared to be filled with a fluid in which pepper floated.

"Better mind me," she coldly assured him. "It's holy water and powdered wolf's bane. You know what that'll do."

He stared from her to the spray gun, then at the garlic window curtains.

"Nuts," he said.

Her velvety eyes searched his face, then she gave a tired sigh. "If you promise not to harm it, you can look."

"Don't bother," he drawled.

But the lamp flared a little higher and he caught a better view of the painting. Something familiar about it. It was a night scene, no moon but bright stars. There were two houses, one sprawled in darkness, the other prim, brightly lighted. And Trice saw something else that made his neck crawl.

"I promise," he said. "All right?"

"Don't hurt it," she pleaded. "I'll finish it tonight."

He stood before the easel, the world forgotten.

HERE was a star-studded night over a luminous lake. On one side the rushes were wet, crushed aside in a wide, slimy path that led up a weedy hillock to a vacant lot that separated two houses. Trice knew he stood in the dark, gabled one. And he knew the other where upper windows blazed with light that reached down to form long quadrangles on the close-cropped lawn.

But what hypnotized Trice was the tremendous monstrosities upreared on the lawn, their green eyes staring lidlessly into the lighted, upper room. Inside, a man's back was toward the window but his figure was familiar. A woman, who could be no other than Mrs. Banker, gazed horror-stricken over her shoulder at the creatures outside. Her eyes were wide and her lips stretched open.

Trice grimaced at the scene. He looked closer at the animals. They stood on hind legs that were elephant size and much longer than the slender, clawed forelegs. Each had a square tail, wide and flat like a beaver's. The slick backs rose up and up, then tapered into long necks. The hideous heads had flat, tusk-studded jaws that reached far back to the ears. Out of these jaws lolled dripping, red tongues.

"Gee!" said Trice, although it sounded more like a gasp.

"Do you," she asked, "think it will work?"

"That thing's unholy!"

"So is Gus Banker!" she retorted.

Trice tore his gaze from the painting, yet sent it many sidelong glances, worried when his eyes were away, and uneasy when he saw it. He frowned at the woman.

"You aren't sending it to Banker?"

"I said we were fighting, didn't I?" she snapped. "I don't think you're on my side. Will you please vanish or . . . or whatever you must do to leave?"

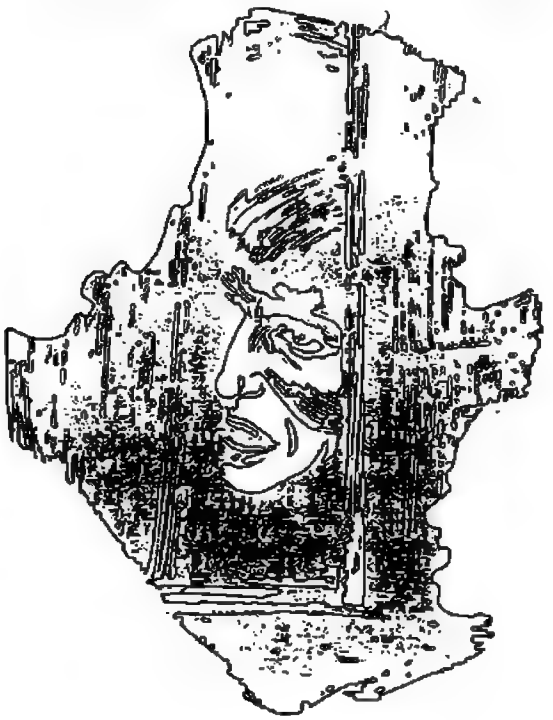
Trice glanced again at the picture, shrugged uncomfortably and walked toward the door. He wanted to leave. He didn't like the mad light in the woman's face, nor the smell of garlic. Nor did he like to be mixed up in this fight between the houses.

A thought stopped him at the door. "Say! Pop Bennett said no one lived—"

"Pop Bennett!" she exclaimed.

"You know him?"

"Certainly I knew him. He once lived here. He's dead."



"That's what you think," said Trice. "I talked to him an hour or so ago."

"You can't scare me!" she said tartly. "You and the rest of your silly ilk can do all the haunting you like. But leave me alone! Understand?"

"But Pop Bennett—"

"He would be on my side." Her face softened. "Tell him to come up if he wants to."

Trice gave an exasperated grunt. "Aren't you afraid," he said sarcastically, "that the garlic will keep him away?"

Those velvety eyes fastened on Trice a moment, then turned to the easel. She slowly shook her head.

"It's for more fearsome things than ghosts."

"Bats!" he said, and shut the door.

He walked angrily down the dusty hall, playing the flashlight straight ahead. Everyone was crazy. He'd go over, tell Gus Banker to jump in the lake— Damn those monsters! Damn that picture! He'd tell Banker a thing or two, then catch the next freight tonight.

TRICE WALKED downstairs and out into the black yard. Banker's house was dark and no one answered his loud hammering.

"O. K.," he promised grimly. "I'll wait till you come home. Play me for a sucker, will you?"

He walked back to the bay-windowed house and sat on the darkened steps. As the minutes dragged, he became more uneasy, swinging around at slight noises. In an almost petulant frame of mind he went inside to a large room, rolled a cigarette, and sat on the floor. His head rested against a window sill.

The smoke rose snakily from the

Continued on page 132

What is SPECIALIZED FICTION?

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Continued from page 129

tobacco. He was idly watching the smoke when a slight jar disturbed him. It came again. Then again, heavier. He stared straight ahead, muscles tensed. It was something outside. It was like a great weight rising and falling without noises, yet earth-trembling. It was like . . . like ponderous footfalls without noise.

Trice came to his feet, stared at the windows, and thought how easily something could reach through.

"Damn that picture!" he growled. "It's nothing but a train passing somewhere."

Nevertheless, he walked into the hall. He knew he wouldn't wait outside for Banker's return. From a window he saw the other house was still dark. Lips were sullen when he walked into the musty kitchen and descended into the cellar. He was angry with himself, but a cautious nature often made silly demands. Anyway, the lone window was high, small and barred.

An hour passed and the last of his tobacco went up in smoke. Trice dozed. Suddenly he jerked erect. He wasn't sure, but, in that dim world of half-sleep, he seemed to remember a noise at the small window, a noise resembling loud sniffs. He swung his flashlight up, but didn't turn it on. He waited, but the sound was not repeated. A finger pressed the catch and a beam of light sprang to the window and disclosed—nothing.

"Just a dog," he said. "Damn that picture!"

Trice went up to the kitchen and gazed at Banker's house. The lights were on.

"O. K., Gus. Here I come."

Trice walked rapidly down the hall, banged the front door behind him, and strode across the empty lot. But as he approached the house his anger cooled. Perhaps he might say the wrong thing and get the girl — What was her name? Mollie? Nellie? That was it. Nellie. Perhaps he would get Nellie in trouble.

He rang the doorbell and knocked at the same time. Moments passed. The front-room light came on and Gus Banker opened the door, one hand stuffing a shirt tail into trousers.

"You!" said Banker. "Don't you know better than to come here?"

"I've got business with you."

"Gus!" His wife's voice was shrill. "Don't leave me here alone! Gus!"

Banker eyed him indecisively. "Well?" he snapped. "What is it?"

"You," said Trice, "told me that house was vacant. It isn't."

"Gus!" The woman's voice struck an hysterical note. "Gus!"

"Shut up!" howled Banker. He turned a worried face to Trice. "We can't talk here. Come on upstairs."

THEY MOUNTED carpeted steps to the second floor. Every light was on. The bedroom door was open and Mrs. Banker, her face the color of dirty dough, rushed out to them.

"Oh, Gus! Why did you leave me?"

"Shut up and go back to bed!" he snarled. He glanced uneasily at Trice. "Well? Go ahead and talk. I haven't all night."

"O. K., smart guy. Nobody makes a sucker out of me. Understand? You never intended to give me a job. You're a louse, and the neighbors know it! Even that old man you saw me with—"

"What man?"

"You saw us at dusk. You stared across from your lawn."

Banker spoke slowly, his voice odd. "But you were alone. You know you were."

"Bats!" said Trice. "You looked —" Then he remembered what the artist had said. Pop Bennett was dead. He wiped moist hands against his trousers. He felt uncertain. "No kidding? Didn't you see anyone with me?"

Banker licked gross lips and exchanged frightened glances with his wife. "Who . . . who else did you see in the house?"

"Only the artist."

"What artist?" gasped Mrs. Banker.

"The one that your husband is trying to run out. Boy! Just wait until you get that picture! Your soul is pretty rotten, Banker. That picture will make you crawl."

Banker gulped, tried to talk but the words jammed in his throat.

"It's got monsters in it," said Trice. The squat man seemed ready to grovel, and Trice was angry enough to give all the hurt he could. "Big monsters. Right outside your window here. Their jaws run all the way back to their ears."

"Don't! Don't!" whispered the woman.

"Anna!" Banker turned hoarsely to his wife. "You *did* hear them!"

Trice felt a little sorry. The woman held to the door jamb as though ready to drop. "Aw, it's only a painting. She'll finish it tonight."

"She? A woman?" Banker raised a trembling hand to his lips. "What did she look like? Quick, man!"

"Fairly young, I'd say. Black-haired. And she had a streak of white through her hair."

"Good God!" said Banker.

"I told you! I told you!" cried the wife. "It's Nellie's ghost. The woman you killed!"

"I didn't kill her! I didn't!" insisted Banker.

Uneasiness akin to panic grew in the room, reached out and touched Trice. He talked quickly, anxious to dispel his own clammy sensations.

"Take it easy, folks. She's no ghost. Why, she thought I was one. She's scared of spooks. There's garlic on the windows, and a spray gun filled with holy water—"

"That's the one!" moaned Mrs. Banker. "It gave Gus the idea that she could be scared. He killed her!"

"That's a lie! It was your idea!"

"What'll we do? What'll we do?" moaned the woman. "As Nellie finishes that painting, the beasts come closer and closer! Gus! What'll we do? She finishes tonight!"

Trice stood in the doorway. His heart walloped back and forth. Suddenly he felt the house tremble as though the earth had been jarred soundlessly. It came again, closer.

Banker stood as though dazed. He pulled off his shirt, then started to put it back on again. His face was covered with sweat as he faced Trice, his back to the window.

Something about the scene sent a cold chill racing up Trice's back. He swung his gaze to the woman. Mrs. Banker stared over her shoulder at the window. Her eyes were wide and her lips stretched cruelly open. There sounded a loud sniff outside.

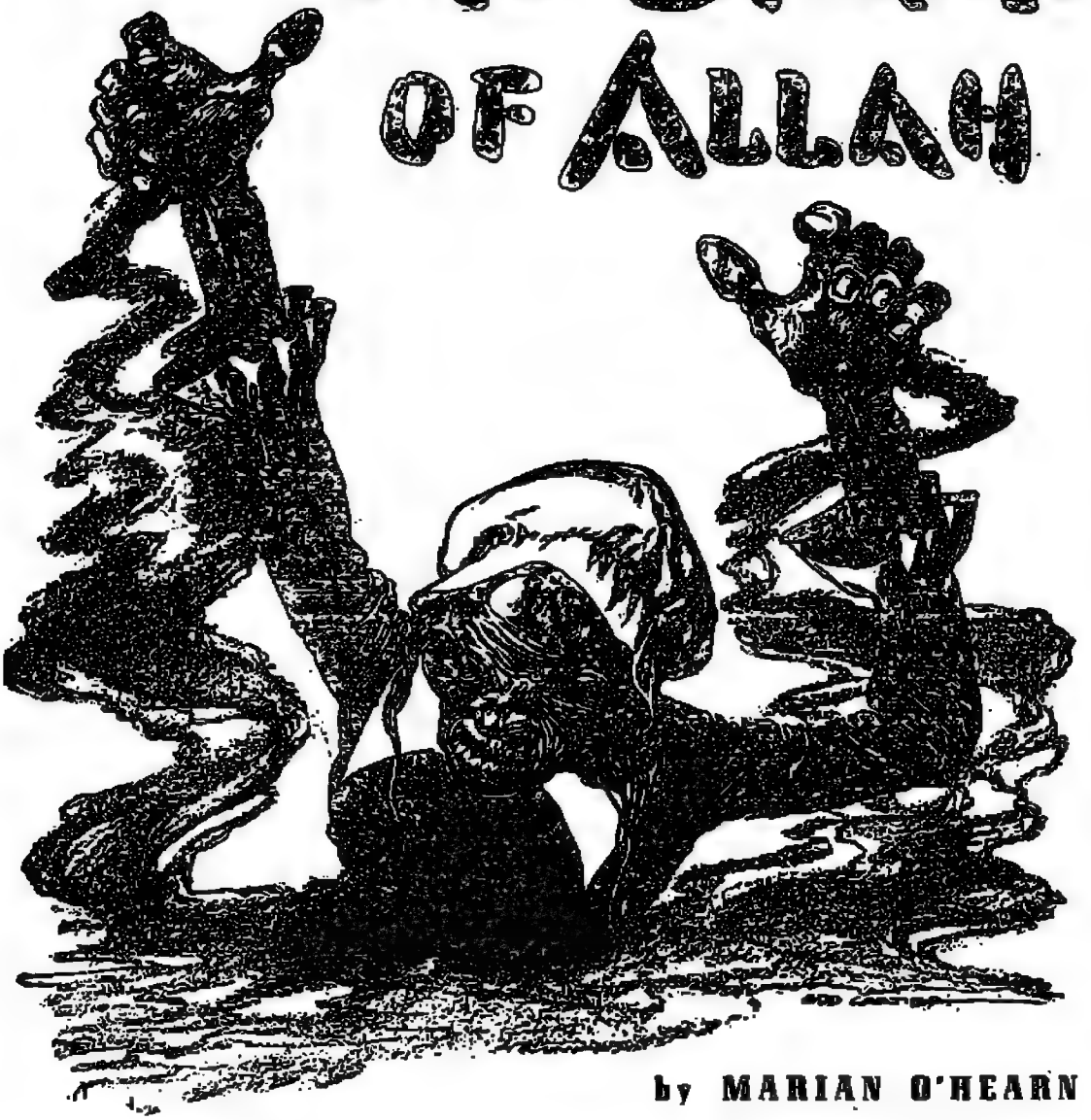
"Gus!" she screamed. "Watch that window!"

Trice ran. He gave a wild leap down the stairs, yanked open the front door and sped into the night toward the railroad tracks and a passing train.

Behind him a man's scream rocketed, then stopped abruptly. Trice sped faster. Even when the freight car door slammed behind him and the train rolled along, Trice never relaxed. Even in his sleep he held the door shut.

THE END.

THE SPARK OF ALLAH



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SYNOPSIS.

Too well-born to be cared for by the Commune of the newly created French Revolutionary government, not prominent enough to be persecuted by them, Demal was simply ignored—and allowed to starve as he wished. Weak with hunger, he was watching the march of the street-women

as they stormed out through the rain to attack the Tuileries, to drive out the still-lingering traces of the hated royalty, Queen Marie Antoinette and King Louis XVI. Weak with hunger, he is almost trampled under the mob when he is saved by a girl, Lucille Favras, and her maid, an incredibly aged Negress, Octavia. A strange ring Lucille Favras wears seems the seat of some deadly power, a glare from her curious green eyes makes an angry soldier fall dead.

Swept on to the Tuileries in the mob, Lucille Favras gives Demal a bit of food, commands him to get for her a little globe of crystal that, she says, Marie Antoinette has stolen from her. He is to recognize it by the fact that it glows with a blue light when touched by human flesh. Demal agrees unwillingly, half mystified, half in fear of this strange woman, yet half in love with her beauty.

He is separated from her when he succeeds in getting the crystal by accident—and discovers its power! So long as he holds it, whatever he commands of anyone, that person will do. Known as "The Spark of Allah," supposedly given Marie Antoinette by Cagliostro, the great magician, it definitely has unearthly powers. Meeting Lucille Favras again, he finds that, while he holds that crystal, he is immune to her commands, immune to the deadly glare of her angry eyes that kills the coachman who, at Demal's command, is taking him back to Paris.

Knowing now the power of the crystal, he sees in it the salvation of the country he loves. France, in the hands of half-mad extremists, is being destroyed. But, since every man he commands must obey so long as he holds the crystal, Demal realizes he can, single-handed, take command of the new government, and raise up a structure that will eliminate the iniquities of the old royal government and the excesses of the revolutionary regime.

He enters the meeting place of the leaders of the revolution and forces them to agree to give him a place on the Commune, then, with Marat, one of the prime movers of the revolution, goes to see Cagliostro. Demal wants to learn from the famous magician something more of the powers of this strange crystal, something of its history, and something of the history of Lucille Favras. For Lucille's face keeps appearing in dark corners, watching him, her green eyes seeming to spy on his every movement—

While visiting Count Cagliostro, Demal finds a sylphid has entered his room and attempted to steal the Spark of Allah. He catches the tiny creature—a perfectly formed woman, seemingly, but reduced to a height of but six inches—and attempts to question Cagliostro. But the sylphid escapes before Demal can question the count.

He returns to Cagliostro's house the next day, accompanied by Lucille Favras. Cagliostro takes him aside, and warns him that the Spark of Allah carries power—but deadly danger as well. It is the property of Lilith, first wife of Adam, the eternal witch! Cagliostro had found the crystal in a strong box looted at a bank during the early revolution, not guessed its true value, and sold it to Marie Antoinette for a fabulous sum claiming—falsely, he thought at the time!—that it was the Spark of Allah. And, says Cagliostro, the strong box *had* borne the name of Lucille Favras! Lucille is Lilith!

Demal demands to see the sylphid again; Cagliostro wants Demal's favor, for, thanks to the Spark, Demal is rapidly gaining power over the Commune and the dreaded Citizens' Committee. Cagliostro shows him the glass-topped box that is the sylphid's bedroom. Lucille—Lilith—returns, and with a sharp command and a glance renders Cagliostro helpless; despite even the powerful protection of the Spark, semi-paralyzes Demal, and performs some incantation that causes the sylphid to expand, grow again to normal size! Lilith then leaves the girl in Demal's hands, and goes.

The ex-sylphid was the Austrian dancer, Isabella Chalons, who came to Paris two years before, was kidnaped and reduced by Cagliostro. Now she is friendless—and France is at war with Austria and suffering a revolution at the same time. Demal agrees to protect her, and takes her back to the hotel where his swift-growing executive staff has been set up.

DEMAL was at his desk in the big corner room on the third floor of the Hotel des Rivoles early the next morning. In an adjoining office, half a dozen clerks had already started their day, and he felt no astonishment that he should be here, preparing to take over the destinies of a nation. Instead, he plunged into plans; outlines of emergency decrees, civil laws and regulations.

And he made a tentative draft of a proclamation to be issued by the Commune which would forbid onlookers at executions. If the people were not allowed to wallow in the spectacle of death, the guillotine would lose its popularity.

Shortly before noon, Peilmande ushered in Josef Germaine, the officer in charge of the military forces in the city, and Demal told him, swiftly, what he wanted. Better policing of the streets—and more protection for the king and queen in the Tuileries.

Germaine's face lighted and he promised to carry out Demal's orders. As he left, he saluted smartly and said: "Monsieur, I heard stories about you yesterday and wondered what France might endure next, but now I hope you'll be able to dominate your party. We need your kind of sanity."

Marat arrived shortly afterward and several members of the Commune followed him, but Demal could tell them nothing except that he would take his seat in forty-eight hours, when he would submit plans for national reorganization. They were disappointed and irritated, but seemed to lose courage in the very middle of their impulsive speeches.

When they finally departed, his hand clenched on the Spark of Allah, and he smiled after their stiffly set backs. The door had barely closed when there was a laugh from behind him. A soft, low laugh like that of Lucille Favras! He whirled, but there was no one except himself in the office, and, in something close to fury, he rang for Peilmande.

"I told you to get in touch with Count Artoland, the diplomat."

"I did. But the letter cannot possibly be delivered until sometime today. If he starts immediately, he won't be here before tomorrow."

Demal nodded dismissal and Peilmande's eyes met his. Green eyes—but they lacked fire. He forced himself back to work and did not even glance up when the assistant re-entered his office. "Yes?"

"Sir, I thought you ought to know. The whole city is boiling. They expect the prisons to be broken open and all political prisoners taken out for execution within the next twenty-four hours."

Demal let the pen drop from his hand. "That again! But it's probably only talk. I gave Marat orders against it, but you'd better send for him. Get word to Commandant Germaine, too."

By three o'clock in the afternoon Demal had many of his plans ready for submission to the Commune and considered the most important the one forbidding crowds at executions. He had also drawn up a paper which would give full protection to every person accused, but not proven guilty, of any crime, regardless of its nature.

Dusk fell early, and only when he realized his office was growing dark did he remember that Marat had not appeared. He rang for Peilmande, who, blank-faced, explained that his messengers had been unable to find Marat.

"Then send more messengers. Make them keep at it until they locate him and bring him here. Report to me every half-hour. I'll be waiting—"

THE CLERK backed to the door, and beyond him, Demal saw Isabella Chalons, and he sprang to his feet. "Come in, come in! Did you want to see me?"

"Only to make sure you have dinner. I would not disturb you otherwise, monsieur. It's here if you are ready."

The waiters brought in the table and finished arranging it.

As Demal seated Isabella he realized that she was wearing a new frock, and smiled a little as he wondered how she had managed it.

"Did I tell you," he inquired, "that you're very beautiful, mademoiselle?"

She flushed faintly, and her dimples gleamed. "If you did, monsieur, I don't mind hearing the statement repeated."

Tonight, he decided, wavering shadows weren't going to end their evening together, and perhaps before it was over— He poured wine into her glass and noticed again the fineness of her hands.

"Isabella," he murmured.

She looked up at him with the line of her throat and chin a clear, delicate curve. And he got to his feet to go to her, but even as he reached her, Peilmande's voice came crisply from the open doorway.

"An urgent message, sir. I don't know who it's from, but the person delivering it insisted you get it at once."

Demal took the envelope, of heavy linen embossed with a tiny, strange-looking coat of arms, noticing that the handwriting was firm and clear. As he tore it open the words on the single sheet of paper seemed to leap out at him.

MY DEAR MONSIEUR DE DEMAL:

Both of us should realize how important we can be to each other. Perhaps, even, how necessary. Still, knowing this, we have not tried to learn much about each other, have we? Our only meetings have been hurried, casual affairs with no place or background. Hoping to change this, I am asking you to come to my home tonight for a few hours of music. I live at No. 2 Avenue Anglaise and both myself and my guests will be most anxious for your arrival. With humble offers of friendship,

LUCILLE FAVRAS.

He reread the message, wondering if it were only his imagination which made the paper cling to his hands.

Cagliostro had said that Lucille Favras was Lilith, and he himself knew that her powers were immeasurably greater than those of the magician. What did she hope to gain by getting him into her home? Was it a trick to take the crystal by force? No. The Spark of Allah gave him too much protection for that. Then—

He studied the words again. "An evening of music." Lilith, entertaining the man who had taken the one thing in the world which was of vital importance to her! His lean face crinkled into a grin, and, holding the letter, he left the office to cross the hall to his bedroom, where he locked it in one of the cabinet drawers. He would send word that affairs of state prevented his accepting the invitation. "Affairs of state." That would be a direct taunt, an affirmation of his own lack of fear.

Or would it? He began to pace the room, thinking of her, seeing her too beautiful face.

Maybe— He threw himself full length on the bed and folded his hands under his head, ignoring the faint whisper of sound from the other side of the room. Perhaps he should go to her "evening" and meet her challenge, with the Spark of Allah on him.

Light fingers touched his shoulder, and Isabella said softly, "Forgive me for following you, but are you upset? Has anything happened?"

"What—" He sprang up in confusion. "No, no. Only an invitation from . . . an old friend."

"For tonight? You'll accept it—now?"

"Yes." He spoke abruptly. "I'm accepting it. In fact, it's very im-

portant for me to do so."

She regarded him in a strangely quiet manner.

"Isabella," said Demal gently, "This is a matter of—national concern or I wouldn't go. I'd much rather spend the evening here with you."

Her dimples showed in a quick smile, but her eyes remained grave. "Thank you, monsieur. But now you must think of dressing. What will you wear?"

"Wear? Oh, yes. There are evening clothes with my other things. Had them sent up yesterday. If you'll ring that bell for the hotel valet I'd better get started."

THE Avenue Anglaise was only a short distance from the Hotel des Rivoles and, when Demal reached Lucille Favras' flat, the door was opened by the ancient Octavia.

She beamed at him, her dry, flat lips working out words. "We were hoping you would come, monsieur. It is good to see you again—and not much like being together at Versailles, is it?"

She took his hat and coat and led him across a pleasant foyer to the long, softly lighted drawing room. She moved lightly, in spite of her bent, aged body, and he noticed, also, that she was dressed in a smart, expensive uniform.

"Monsieur de Demal." She announced importantly, and Lucille left her guests to greet him. And, as she approached, Demal touched the Spark of Allah in the tiny inside pocket of his dress coat, a pocket he had ordered so that, no matter what his costume, the crystal would be on his person.

Lucille was no less radiant, and her eyes no less filled with distant flame. He bowed and she gave him her hand.

"Only some unheard-of magic could make you increasingly beautiful," he said.

"No magic. Dressmaker's art." And, as coquettishly as a girl, she turned around to display the silver gown which outlined her body to perfection. Diamonds blazed at her throat, but there was only one jewel on her hand—and that was the great emerald.

The other guests were presented; people whom Demal did not know, but who possessed the casual elegance of accustomed wealth and position. The women were on the young, attractive side, and the men obviously well-bred.

Servants slipped into the richly furnished drawing room, and began to arrange chairs before a small dais which held a clavecin and a harp. "I promised you an evening of music," Lucille told him, "and it's about to begin."

She gestured to her guests to find places, and, as the lights were lowered, led Demal to a chair beside her own. A slender young man appeared, bowed to the mild spatter of applause, seated himself at the clavecin and looked expectantly toward a curtained doorway. The curtains parted finally, and a girl entered the rom. A girl almost as breathtaking as Lucille Favras, except that—

Demal bent forward tensely. She was moving toward the harp, settling herself at it, and her hair was as black, her eyes as softly blue as those of Isabella Chalons!

He shut his teeth over his quickly drawn breath and glanced at Lucille. "She reminds me of someone I've met."

"Why, ye-es." The green, fire-threaded glance went thoughtfully to the dais. "Who is it— Why, of course, the little sylphid. Strange,

how people all seem to belong to a definite type, isn't it?"

"Perhaps. But the sylphid is now a normal-sized woman. Don't you remember that you brought her out of her imprisonment?"

"Hush—not so loudly! You may be heard, and my guests would be startled if they knew all about us—either one of us, Monsieur de Demal. In fact, I'm quite sure if they had any knowledge of our visits to Cagliostro's house they would rush, screaming, into the street."

"Somehow I doubt that," he murmured. "What of Cagliostro? You told him to leave France."

"He's left, and he won't return—"

The first ripple of the clavecin cut through her low words, and she stopped speaking. The musician played exquisitely, and the mood of Cresti Varren poured out into the room for long, wild moments before the melody of the harp brought rippling gentleness. The girl, her hands so supple and sure, was an artist, and everyone in the room fell under a soft enchantment. Here was sunshine, security, peace, singing to people of a darkened land.

Demal felt his tautness disappear, and as he relaxed he became aware of his own weariness. Lucille drooped back against her chair and watched the musicians with eyes which saw only her own visions. Observing her like this, it was hard to believe Cagliostro's wild tale or even to accept what he himself had witnessed.

She stirred, and her lips parted. She was humming, gently, forgetful of everything except the spell of the music and the quiet in which it had enveloped the room. Her hum, accompanying the melody, grew until it lifted richly from her throat—and then changed into the exultant pur of a gigantic cat!

THE MUSIC stopped on a jangling discord, but the wild jungle pur went on, growing in volume until it filled the whole room. Demal got to his feet, waiting—but the others were up, too, pushing back their seats and staring at each other with white, frightened faces.

The pur was so resonant that it vibrated dizzily through the brain, and every one of Lucille Favras' guests stood as if unable to move. A woman's hysterical scream broke the frozen stillness, and as one they whirled for the doors.

"Madame, madame!" Old Octavia was shrieking like a crazed thing. "The humming— You hummed!"

Lucille jerked out of her chair. "What's happening? What's this talk of humming?"

"You didn't hum," Demal said, feeling as rigid and chilled as the other guests had looked. "You purred—just as you purred at the foot of the scaffold before the blade jammed and bent!"

"Blade?" Her eyes were beginning to storm, flame leaping up through the emerald surface. "You're mad!"

"Madame, please!" Octavia screeched. "They are running away. Soon word will be everywhere about you. They'll say it's Cagliostro's teaching, or some such thing!"

"Yes. Yes." She straightened and brushed past Demal to stand over the old woman. "Go into the hall after them, and hurry! The dust of Allah must stop them."

Octavia fled, running for the foyer, but Lucille remained where she was, lifting her hands in a strange, barbaric gesture, while a jet of light poured out of the emerald on her finger.

"Hold on," Demal snapped.

"What did you send that old devil to do? Wait—"

He sprang after the aged Negress, crashing into the entrance hall, where the guests—he realized now that there were twelve of them, six men and six women—were huddled helplessly against the outer door. They had apparently failed to open it and were cowering from Octavia, who was confronting them with her hands lifted in the same gesture Lucille Favras had made.

But something was emerging from Octavia's hands—a thickish little cloud which looked like dust. It bounced wickedly toward the men and women crouched at the door, and a second ball of vapor followed it. A third, like dusty light, floated through the air before he could reach the old woman and pinion her arms.

"What are you doing? Let those people go!"

The flat-edged opening which was her mouth worked furiously, but her eyes gleamed with clear, malicious triumph. "They can't go now," she told him when the words finally came from her writhing lips.

He heeled about, his hands dropping from the clammy old arms. The whole group of people, twelve of them, were sprawled on the floor just as they had dropped. Some were lying over each other, some were flat, their faces pressed against the hard wood, others were bent into ghastly, lifeless attitudes.

"Name of a name!" he mumbled. "They look as if they're dead! As if—"

He forced his legs to move, to carry him toward the mound of tangled bodies, and, distrusting his own vision, which told him death had already come to all twelve, bent to touch their flesh. It was as cold as if they had died many hours before!

He straightened slowly, his brain reeling and numbness spreading over him. There was someone behind him, approaching carefully. The Spark of Allah—

With an effort which sent sweat pouring down his face he thrust his arm up and pushed his stiff hand into the pocket holding the crystal.

Octavia had done this—at her mistress' orders! They had killed, murdered a dozen people! Certainly this was one case where the guillotine should not be spared!

With the crystal under his hand, he swung around to face the old black woman. But she was no longer there, and he was the only living thing in that little chamber of death.

The Negress had escaped. He leaped for the drawing room and was halfway across it before he realized that Lucille was standing where he had left her. She was very straight, her arms at her sides and her eyes on his face, as if waiting for him!

DEMAL stopped before her. "They are all dead."

She nodded, no flicker of emotion on her face, and he wanted to feel his hands close about her throat. Maybe he could strangle the truth out of her—whether she were Lilith or merely a sorceress. But it had been Octavia who had sent death floating into the faces of Lucille's guests. If she could wield such unearthly power, why was she a servant?

"She's not," he told himself. "That's part of the act. This woman may actually be her servant—may be carrying out the orders of the disgusting old crone, who's really the deathless witch Cagliostro talked about. If the crystal has been missing too long, it's logical that Lilith

would become a picture of ugly decay.

"Where Octavia?" he demanded.

Lucille shook her head, her eyes unseeing. "I don't know."

"You must know! You sent her after your guests—told her to stop them with the dust of Allah! Then you—"

"I don't know," she repeated dully.

"All right, I'll search for her. But first I'll make sure that you stay where you are."

She did not speak, nor did her still face change, and he knew she was not even seeing him. The house was utterly quiet now around them, as if it were shaping itself into a tomb for the still things lying in the hall. But a little while ago there had been several menservants who arranged the chairs for the musicale. And the musicians—

The dais was empty, but he saw a bell cord on the wall and hurriedly pulled it down. When the hush did not break he knew that the place was deserted except for Lucille and himself.

He gestured grimly. "Sit in that chair behind you. I'm going to tie you into it."

She sat down calmly. "Searching for Octavia won't do any good. You can't find her."

Helplessly he looked down at the features which were like tinted marble, and wondered why the fire had left her eyes. She did not even seem aware of his scrutiny, and he knew she had told him the simple truth. If he searched every inch of the house he would find no trace of Octavia, the servants, or the musicians.

Once more he glanced carefully about the beautifully lighted, graceful room, stopping his gaze as it wandered to the foyer and the unmoving forms on the floor. "Who is Octavia? I saw . . what she did tonight. One of you is the mistress, but which one?"

She turned her head and regarded him thoughtfully. "Cagliostro should have told you that."

"And you won't? In that case I'll take you with me right now."

"Take me with you?"

"Yes, to prison. In all the uproar about dangerous influences in France, nothing has been said of the greatest danger—you. Twelve people are dead, and you'll be charged with their murder."

She stood, apparently unmoved. "I'd like to get a wrap."

"I'll go with you, and don't try to get away, because you can't. The Spark of Allah is in my hand, and your tricks will be useless."

"I know. My room is on the other side of the foyer. I'll show you the way."

He followed her, watching as she swerved to avoid the piled horror before the door. But as she stepped past she did not even glance down, and, in her room, she took up a fur cape and pulled it about her shoulders. "I'm ready now."

He closed the door of her room, walked past the hideous tableau in the little hall. "There must be a rear entrance. We'll go through that."

LUCILLE FAVRAS led the way from the drawing room, through a dining room and kitchen out to a back gallery, where the door opened onto a flight of steps. He took her arm as they descended, determined that she should have no slightest chance to escape, and when they emerged onto the street he whistled for a carriage.

"Go toward the Hotel des Rivo-

les;" he told the driver, and handed the girl up.

"I thought you were taking me to prison."

"I am. Maybe you've forgotten that there's a small barracks on the way to the hotel."

"No, I hadn't forgotten, but I thought you'd be afraid to—let me get away from you and the Spark of Allah."

"I'll take the chance," he said grimly.

She sank back against the carriage cushions and kept her glance straight ahead, apparently staring at the driver's broad shoulders. But he knew that she was seeing nothing, feeling nothing, hardly aware that he was beside her. And a tremor spread through his body—the quivering of struggling flesh and nerves.

A flare of lights showed ahead, and he ordered the driver to stop. Getting down, he helped Lucille to the ground, and as a soldier barred his way, snapped, "I wish to see the commandant at once."

After a moment's delay they were taken into the office of the commander, who was a small, excitable-looking man with a great bald head. "This lady"—Demal spoke with a tongue which seemed to beat wildly against his dry mouth—"has a flat at No. 2 Avenue Anglaise. In it you'll find a dozen people—six men and six women—murdered. She and her maid killed them. That's all I can tell you now, but see she's placed in safe custody, and warn all your men that she is the most dangerous thing they've ever handled. I've seen her—" He broke off as he read the incredulity in the officer's eyes. "Watch her every moment, and don't give her a chance to escape. I understand that, as student of Cagliostro, she often practices mesmerism. The men in charge of her should remember that."

"Monsieur!" The commandant gasped. "This is . . . this is—May I ask who *you* are?"

"Certainly. I'm Henri de Demal, and if you'll send someone to the Hotel des Rivoles you'll probably find Jean Marat, who—"

"Of course, of course. I have heard of you, and only today my superiors spoke of how much you promise France! I'll do exactly as you say, and if this woman is so dangerous she shall go to the Conciergerie. No one has a chance of escaping from there!"

The Conciergerie was the most carefully guarded, uncomfortable and unpleasant prison in the city, and, in spite of himself, Demal's lips opened over a quick protest. But he closed them again and told Lucille Favras: "Good night, madame."

She smiled. A slow, deliberate smile which lighted her face. "Is that all you have to say to me?"

"What can I say? I wish that I had not been the one to bring you here."

"You know"—the words were almost a chuckle—"I really believe that. Be careful of your soft heart, because a dictator has no right to one, and you dream of becoming dictator, don't you?"

"Madame, you seem not to understand—"

"You know quite well that I do. But what you don't know is—"

"What?"

She shook her head, the deliberate smile deepening, and, as her glance lifted to his, the flame was once more showing beneath its surface. He turned sharply to the door as a squad of soldiers entered to form a square about the prisoner.

She was always near him—a dim, misty figure with green eyes shining, watching—

Outside, Demal started for his hotel at a brisk walk. Later he would return for another talk with the commandant, and after the bodies had been removed from the flat, the cause of death might be discovered. The cause—an old black woman gesturing with hands from

which balls of dusty vapor floated into the faces of her victims.

"There has to be another answer, though," he muttered half aloud. "Something more than what I saw."

There was a crowd ahead of him on the street. Excited, jabbering people were moving toward the center of town, shrilling meaningless words about enemy prisoners.

He turned the corner above his hotel and saw a seething human mass ahead. The steps and doors were packed with men who waved their arms as they bellowed: "Long live the republic! Death to the enemies of the people!"

"What is this? What's happening?"

No one answered or even noticed him, but then he glimpsed the expressionless face of his assistant, Peilmande, and called to him. The clerk pushed through, talking breathlessly, "I'm glad you've come at last, monsieur. The prisons have been broken into, the prisoners captured. Some of them were killed in their cells, but others are being taken to the Place du Carrousel and—"

"Did any of your messengers find Jean Marat?"

"No, monsieur, but they are still searching."

"Tell them to stop. He doesn't want to be found. At least, not right now."

The prison massacre Marat had suggested was under way. Perhaps the little man had had nothing to do with it. Probably he was not even aware of what was happening, for, realizing the power in Demal's hands, he had been almost coweringly afraid.

"No." Demal spoke aloud. "Others of the Commune, maybe, but not Marat, although it makes no difference now."

He realized that Peilmande was still waiting, pale eyes watchful in his blank face.

"Some of the prisoners are being taken to the guillotine, you say? Then find me a carriage, quickly. I want to reach Josef Germaine. Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes, monsieur. If you wish, I'll go with you."

"Good—hurry up a carriage."

Peilmande disappeared and came back almost immediately with a hack he had commandeered, and fifteen minutes later they got down before Germaine's house.

But a frightened maid told them that "The commandant rushed out to summon all the troops in the city. There are terrible things happening. They say many will be killed tonight. The master—"

Demal turned away, and he and Peilmande strolled silently down the gloomy street. When they paused at the corner the clerk said, "Well, sir?"

He shrugged. "Nothing. You may as well return to the hotel. I'm going to the Place du Carrousel."

ALL OF PARIS seemed to have joined the human wolf pack, and the roads leading to the Place du Carrousel were almost impassable, but Henri de Demal got through—by keeping his hand on the glowing glass ball which was called the Spark of Allah. Without conscious effort, people moved aside as he approached and made a path for him. Ahead, the cry of the kill was shrilling and he could see the blade of the guillotine flash down.

The death shriek wavered to an end as mounted soldiers began to ride into the square, brandishing their weapons. But even as the

troops worked furiously to reach the guillotine, the blade gleamed again and yet again.

Demal edged back until he was against the wall of a building and, standing there, watched with grim, hopeless anger. How well the blade had been repaired after the uncanny accident which occurred while Lucille Favras sat, humming, at the foot of the scaffold. She should be in the Conciergerie now, safely behind its bars—unless that, too, was being attacked!

"It will be," he told himself, "but they'll never get her into the Black Widow's arms, and there's only one way to be sure she doesn't escape. I've got to stay with her."

He started out, moving slowly, although a path always opened before him. One woman, turning aside as he approached, seemed strikingly familiar, and he glanced after her—only to lunge back into the crowd. That had been the face of Lucille Favras; it could be no other! He caught up with her, and as his hand clamped on her arm, spun her around. But it was not Lucille—and a woman he had never seen regarded him in angry amazement.

With mumbled apologies, he plunged away, but when he emerged from the *Place*, it was to turn toward the Hotel des Rivoles instead of the Conciergerie, for he had suddenly remembered the girl harpist who had been at Lucille's flat. Why hadn't he believed his own sight and sense, then, instead of realizing the truth now? The girl could have been no one except Isabella Chalons, which meant that she had escaped from Cagliostro only to be enslaved by Lucille Favras!

He was running when he entered the hotel, and, dashing for the stairs, did not even pause for breath until he reached the third floor, where he pounded on the door of the small chamber, calling: "Isabella—Isabella! Answer me!"

The door opened, and she looked up at him. She was wearing the dress she had worn before he left, and not the striking gown of the harpist! But her eyes and her hair, her dimples and the curve of her arms, were exactly like those of the musician!

"Monsieur—you're ill. Come in, quickly. But no, I'll take you to your own room, where you can rest. So—we'll be there in a minute."

He straightened up. "I'm not that badly off. I was merely worried about you. Afraid something might have happened while I was away."

"But you're white and worn out!" She led him firmly into his room, closed the door, and after he was seated, began to remove his shoes.

But when she tried to help him out of his jacket he stopped her, his hand sliding down to the pocket which held the crystal. "No, little Isabella. That's one thing you must never do. Only I must touch my coats."

"Why—of course, monsieur! I'll bring your lounging robe."

He took the robe and carefully transferred the Spark of Allah. He had forgotten that he intended to go to the Conciergerie, and when he finally remembered, knew he would be too late. By this time Lucille would either be dead or free—and he was sure she was not dead.

He became aware of Isabella, standing near the door, and said apologetically: "I'm sorry. I just realized how kind you've been since I returned—as if—"

"Why shouldn't I be kind?" She broke in. "You were ill and needed help. You have been—you still are—very kind to me."

She moved into the room and took the chair opposite him. And once more he realized that he wanted to keep her close to him, that her nearness meant more than just the realization of her loveliness. She was a gift from life, a gift from the Spark of Allah, and belonged with him.

But as he fumbled for the words he needed, a vision of Lucille Favras built itself rapidly within his brain, became so clear that her shimmering glance seemed to look out at him from Isabella's face. His speech died, and finally the girl said good night and returned to her own room. It was a long time before he went angrily to bed, determined that Lucille, or Lilith, would not again prevent his explaining to Isabella that he no longer considered any means of getting her out of France because he could not part from her.

DEMAL was sure he could not sleep, but when he got into bed, with the crystal hidden in his night clothes, he dropped into an immediate slumber, which was shattered by the sound of frantic pounding.

Instantly awake, he sat up in bed and saw that daylight was pouring into the room. The pounding was being made by a heavy fist against his door, and, swinging his feet to the floor, he went to answer.

"I'm sorry, monsieur," Peilmande burst out, trying to talk before the men behind him could speak. "Commandant Germaine and Monsieur Marat—"

"Yes, yes. Come in, gentlemen." He held the door until they entered and then closed it firmly upon his assistant. Germaine dropped into a chair at once, as if his legs had given way, and his face was a white gauntness in which his eyes were feverishly sleepless. But Marat remained standing and Demal turned on him.

"You, Marat—" he began.

"Wait!" the little man cried. "I swear to you I knew nothing of what was going to happen. I know I suggested the very same thing a few hours before, but when you refused, I gave orders to that effect! Believe me—"

"Where were you? I had dozens of people looking for you."

"I went a few miles out into the country to stay with friends, monsieur. I can prove that. They will tell you—"

"All right." Demal nodded wearily, for Marat's terror convinced him that he was telling the whole truth. "What's done is done, and our job is to see that it doesn't happen again. Call a meeting of the Commune for this afternoon. There will never be another prison massacre."

Marat nodded. "I'll notify the others at once."

As he scuttled out, Demal sat down opposite Germaine, and both of them were silent until the soldier threw out his hands helplessly. "We were taken by surprise, and the men did what they could. But there are so few soldiers here now because of the war, and the mob was in control before we knew what was happening."

"I saw it. I went to the Place du Carrousel last night. Maybe we can work out a scheme of enlisting men over the fighting age for police work and train them to uphold the law. If we could only stop these killings long enough for the people to regain their sanity!"

"I don't know." Germaine rubbed his face with nervous hands. "We can try, but I'm afraid any recruits we get here will incline toward terrorist methods. It might be dangerous to equip them with weapons to

lead more mobs. Still, I'll talk to some of my officers about it."

He got up heavily and started out, but Demal called him back. "If this could happen to the prisons—what may not happen to the Tuileries? After so much bloodshed, there may be an attempt on the king and queen."

"That's what I'm expecting," Germaine said grimly. "I've put all the men I can possibly spare on guard, but I'm not even sure of them. The Switzers are reliable, but the National Guard is part of the people's movement—whatever in the name of Heaven that is!"

The officer's words stopped abruptly, and he paced nervously to the windows. Demal, looking after him, saw a movement in the faint shadow cast by a big chair which faced toward the wall.

If *she* were here now and Germaine became aware of her, he might lose some of the power he was so rapidly gathering. Certainly her uncanny appearance in his rooms would shake the army man's confidence in him and he could do little without military support! The Spark of Allah might bring him frightened obedience, but he needed more than that.

GERMAINE halted at the windows, his back turned to the room, and Demal strode swiftly to the chair. Yes, it was occupied—but by Isabella Chalons!

She started up with springing apologies, "I didn't think you would see me, monsieur. The door was open and I slipped in to ask if you wanted breakfast, fearing you might still be upset. When I saw the commandant I crouched down in the chair so that he wouldn't notice. I thought he would go in a moment."

"Monsieur," Germaine said, his tired eyes lighting with amusement. "We can finish our discussion later and I'm very sorry to have inconvenienced the young lady."

"No. Don't go yet, please. Mademoiselle Chalons, this is Commandant Germaine—or perhaps you have met before?"

"Oh, no," the girl said. "But I'm happy to do so now. Happier than either of you realize, because while you were talking of last night—of that night of horror—and wondering about the safety of the queen, I thought of a scheme. Would you like to hear it?"

"Of course," the soldier said smoothly, smiling indulgently.

"Well, it is just this." She turned to Demal. "There's no way to protect poor Louis and Marie Antoinette, and everyone knows they'll not be rescued by an invasion. Nothing is going to save them, and sooner or later they'll be led to the guillotine. Poor things, what good will it do to kill them? They're practically prisoners now, and the Tuileries may be attacked at any moment. The only hope is for them to escape from the country."

Demal shook his head. "They've already tried to escape and were brought back. It only made their situation worse. No, that's impossible."

"Is it?" she demanded softly. "Are you sure? I'm certain you could arrange for them to get away, monsieur. Certain of it, for you can do anything. If the matter were properly handled, with the right people arranging it—men like yourself and the commandant—it would work. Otherwise, one day soon, the king and queen will go to the guillotine."

"She's right," Germaine murmured. "Getting out of the country is their only chance of living.

Still"—he lifted his shoulders—"since they bungled one runaway, everyone's waiting for them to try again, and that'll be the end of them."

But Demal, sinking into the chair in which the girl had been hidden, was suddenly not in agreement. Getting the king and queen out of France should not be impossible—at least, not for a man who possessed the Spark of Allah. If it were done with enough daring, the royal couple could be out of the country before the populace knew what was happening.

"Mademoiselle is right," he said slowly. "We've got to do it. There's no other way of keeping them alive, and their death will be a disgrace to France."

"But how?" Germaine demanded. "Who'd dare help us?"

Demal smiled. "There'll be plenty of people to help us. Marat, Gardinier, and others we can trust."

"Marat and Gardinier? Why, they're the very last people who would even listen to such a scheme!"

"They'll listen and do as they're told. If you'll come back this afternoon I'll have all arrangements made."

"Then you'll try it? When?"

"Probably tonight. The sooner we get them out of the Tuileries, the better."

"But—" Germaine started to speak, only to halt, awkwardly, as his glance locked with that of Demal. "I'll be here," he finished, so swiftly that his words rushed over each other. "Good day, mademoiselle—and monsieur."

The girl turned excitedly to Demal. "I'm glad!" she cried. "And you're splendid—I know you'll succeed."

He touched her hair. "It was your idea, little Isabella. I wouldn't have considered it except for you."

It was a little after four o'clock when Commandant Germaine returned to Demal's headquarters, where he was immediately ushered into the big corner office.

"I've reconsidered!" The soldier almost exploded. "It would be suicide—"

"Be still," Demal told him, and nodded a curt dismissal to Peilmande. When the door was closed he pushed out a chair and waited until Germaine was seated.

"It's more than possible. It's actually going to take place, and your help is important. You're in command of all soldiers in the city, aren't you? And in charge of the military guard at the Tuileries?"

"Not directly, but the Tuileries' officer is under my orders."

"Good. Then tonight you'll see that the regular guard detail is sent to a distant part of the city. Wait, wait, man! You'll procure guard uniforms and send them to me, Marat, and half a dozen others. At the time the guard changes we will arrive."

Germaine got up, shaking his head. "We? Do you mean that you expect me, an officer, to betray my country?"

Demal grinned. "When you received your commission you swore allegiance to the throne and promised to protect the king with your life. This is your chance to keep that promise."

"But it can't be done, I tell you. How will you get them away? They can't just walk from the city."

"I'll have a carriage waiting—an ordinary, unnoticeable affair, and not a coach of state such as they used once before."

"No. It won't work. It's bound

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to be discovered. Why, at times I think most of the town stays awake nights just to keep its eyes on the Tuileries."

Demal got up and looked at the other man as if he were regarding him from a great height, for the Spark of Allah made him aware that Germaine, too, was a puny, human thing. Their eyes locked and the soldier straightened into stiffness. His paling face set, but then his glance fell. "Very well, I'll arrange it—as you wish. The guard uniforms will be ready."

"Have mine delivered here."

"What about the king and queen? You'll have to let them know, otherwise they won't be prepared."

"That's just the idea." Demal chuckled ironically. "If we were to inform the queen, she would want the escape put off until a new gown was completed. No, they'll be told when we get there tonight, and they'll go as they are, without baggage or anything else. They're not being invited on a pleasure jaunt."

Germaine saluted and turned on his heel, but then faced back to the desk. "I forgot something, sir, which you should have known earlier. Last night you ordered the arrest of Madame Favras, and this morning it was reported to me that she had escaped from the Conciergerie."

"I expected this," Demal said indifferently. "No trace of her, of course."

"None. But the deaths of the people found in her flat are being thoroughly investigated, and we'll find her, you can be sure of that."

"I'm not sure of it, but never mind. Your men probably did their very best."

TURNING BACK to his desk, Demal consulted his watch. The afternoon was almost gone, and the guard at the palace would be changed at ten thirty that night. Afterward would come long, hard hours, for he would not dare leave Louis and his wife until they were at a safe distance from the city. Which meant he had better get some sleep.

He called Peilmande and gave him instructions that he was not to be disturbed until a package from Commandant Germaine arrived.

"But Monsieur Marat has called a special meeting of the Commune!"

"Get word to him that the meeting must be postponed until tomorrow. Matters of vital importance make it impossible for me to attend today."

"Yes, sir. What about Count Artoland? He is here now, awaiting an audience. You sent for him."

Demal frowned, for the talk with Artoland would consume at least an hour. And the count must be handled delicately so that he would be eager to embark upon the work Demal wanted him to do. With Artoland acting as his emissary, Demal meant to make definite peace overtures to Austrian and Prussian leaders.

"Ask him, also, to excuse me. Explain that I sent for him to undertake a highly important task which will necessitate long discussions. If he will wait until the day after tomorrow, I'll be at leisure. Tell him to put up here in the hotel as my guest."

The pale-green eyes of Peilmande opened a little, but the blankness of his face remained as he bowed himself out. Demal locked the door after him, and then, thoughtfully, made his way to his bedroom.

As he stepped over the threshold, his preoccupation dropped from him and his body tightened into alertness. There was someone in the

room, waiting, and he knew that it would be Lucille Favras—come to taunt him with the fact of her escape.

He saw the slim figure standing at the window and opened his mouth to speak, but as she turned he saw that it was Isabella.

"I was waiting for you. You've made plans to rescue the king and queen, haven't you?"

He hesitated, his lips closing into thinness. But her young face was so expectant that he put a hand on her shoulder. "Yes. I guess you've the right to know, since it was your suggestion. We're trying it tonight."

"How? How, monsieur?"

"Very simply. A few of us will take the place of the palace guard—and there it is."

"Oh." But she frowned. "How could you be mistaken for the soldiers?"

"Easy." He laughed. "We'll be dressed as soldiers. Which means there's a long night ahead of me."

"And now you want to rest," she added. "Of course. I'll see you before you go." She smiled and went out.

Demal dropped onto the bed, realizing, as he fell into restful haziness, that since owning the Spark of Allah he could always attain instant sleep. "The crystal has made me into a god," he mumbled.

WHEN Demal awoke, Isabella was standing over him. "See," she whispered. "There it is—the uniform. It just came and I brought it right in to you."

"Good. Thank you, Isabella, and if I don't see you again tonight, we'll meet in a few hours."

"Oh, but I'm coming back as soon as you've some clothes on. I must be sure that you've put the uniform on properly."

He got up sleepily, and after a hasty wash, began to pull on the stiffly confining uniform. It was uncomfortable, and he'd be glad to get out of the thing as soon as tonight's work was over.

Fingers tapped on the door and Isabella slipped in. "There, I knew you'd get the neck part wrong. Come here and I'll fix it. And oh—your clothes." She pointed accusingly to the garments he had just taken off, which were lying in a heap on the floor.

Before he could protest, she had caught them up and carried them to the wardrobe. She took a long time about placing them there, and when she turned back to him her blue eyes seemed overbright and her face flushed.

"Now, wait," he murmured. "I haven't got—"

"Here, here is the coat." She held the military jacket out and helped him into it.

And then a startled gasp broke from her lips. "Look at the clock—it's almost ten thirty! What could have happened to make us forget the time! Hurry—oh, hurry!"

"In the name of a camel's mother!" Demal moaned. "My watch must have stopped! But I'll still make it."

He snatched up his hat, plunged through the door, raced to the stairs and down them to the street, where he jumped into the nearest carriage. He had promised to meet Germaine at a point halfway between the Tuileries and the Place du Carrousel, and now he urged the driver to greater speed, using both entreaties and curses.

The appointed place was finally reached, and he got out hastily. But there was no one waiting, and the whole street seemed empty. He moved back against a wall and lis-

tened tensely to each approaching footstep or creak of wheels, but the minutes crept ruthlessly on. He looked at his troublesome watch again and again, but its hands did not yet point to ten thirty! Had he missed Germaine and the others? Would they have carried through without him? Carriages began to come briskly toward him, and feet slapped the sidewalk. Six or eight—no, ten men were approaching. A moment later he saw the gleam of bright uniforms and called, "Germaine, are you there?"

"Yes." The soldier snapped up a salute. "We're early, sir. But in a moment we'll make for the Tuileries. It's better to go down the middle of the street boldly, as the guard detachment would."

"You've taken care of the regular detail?"

"Yes. There'll be no hitch."

"It's strange," Demal murmured. "I thought I was late. That clock in my room—" His words cut off on a queer, cracked note, and his hand shoved frantically into the pocket of his military jacket. An unfamiliar pocket which he had trouble finding—which he did not recall exploring before! The crystal—the Spark of Allah—where was it?

He couldn't have—. Good God! He had left it in the coat he had removed before getting into the uniform!

"Impossible!" he exploded aloud. "I've never forgotten—never for a moment. Not even in my sleep."

"Sir?" Germaine demanded, his voice startled.

What had made him forget the thing upon which his very existence depended? Isabella, of course. She had insisted on helping him into the military coat, had caught up the discarded clothes to hang them in the wardrobe—and then rushed him out by saying he was late, that his watch was slow!

Germaine was watching him with narrowed, apprehensive eyes, and he caught hold of himself, straightened carefully. He had better go back to the hotel at once and find the crystal. Find it—if it were still there!

He would be too late to go to the Tuileries, but without the Spark of Allah—

"Commandant!" he said.

Germaine was barking, "Fall in. We've just two minutes to reach the Tuileries."

When Demal remained where he was, the officer turned with his face a cold, questioning mask. "We're falling in, monsieur."

"But—" No, he couldn't say that he had changed his mind and was refusing to take part in his own wild scheme! Germaine would be justified in killing him, and certainly it would be the end of tonight's adventure—the finish of any control he might have over the army.

He stepped out to join the others, who, in marching formation, were facing away from the Place du Carrousel. Germaine thrust a gun into his hands and pointed to the front of the column. "Take your place there, sir."

WOODENLY, Demal obeyed, and the march began. In his confusion he had forgotten to find out how many of the Commune members were in the party. Certainly he had not seen Marat's diminutive figure, although he might have missed him in the dusk.

His hand moved toward the place where his pocket would ordinarily have been, and a jangling spasm of nerves clenched his fingers together. This would be simple, with the crystal on him, but now—

The brilliantly lighted Tuileries were just across the square. Dully, he wondered how many lamplighters were required to keep the place illuminated so that everyone in the city could watch their rulers' prison.

"Hi—hup!" Germaine's voice was nervous. "About face. March to the gates."

Their feet stamped in unison, and they swung smartly around, headed through the gates to the great, gloomy building. In another moment they would be inside.

"Hal-t!"

They stopped as the pound of other marching feet approached, and waited while the retiring guard came into view. A young officer moved up to Germaine and saluted.

"My compliments, sir. I'm turning the detail over—"

His words slowed, wavered, and he leaned forward. "You— Why, it's Commandant Germaine!"

The older officer stiffened. "Get on with it! Personal greetings aren't necessary."

But the captain of the guard continued to stare in amazement at his superior. When his glance lifted, it darted over the men behind Germaine—flicked from face to face.

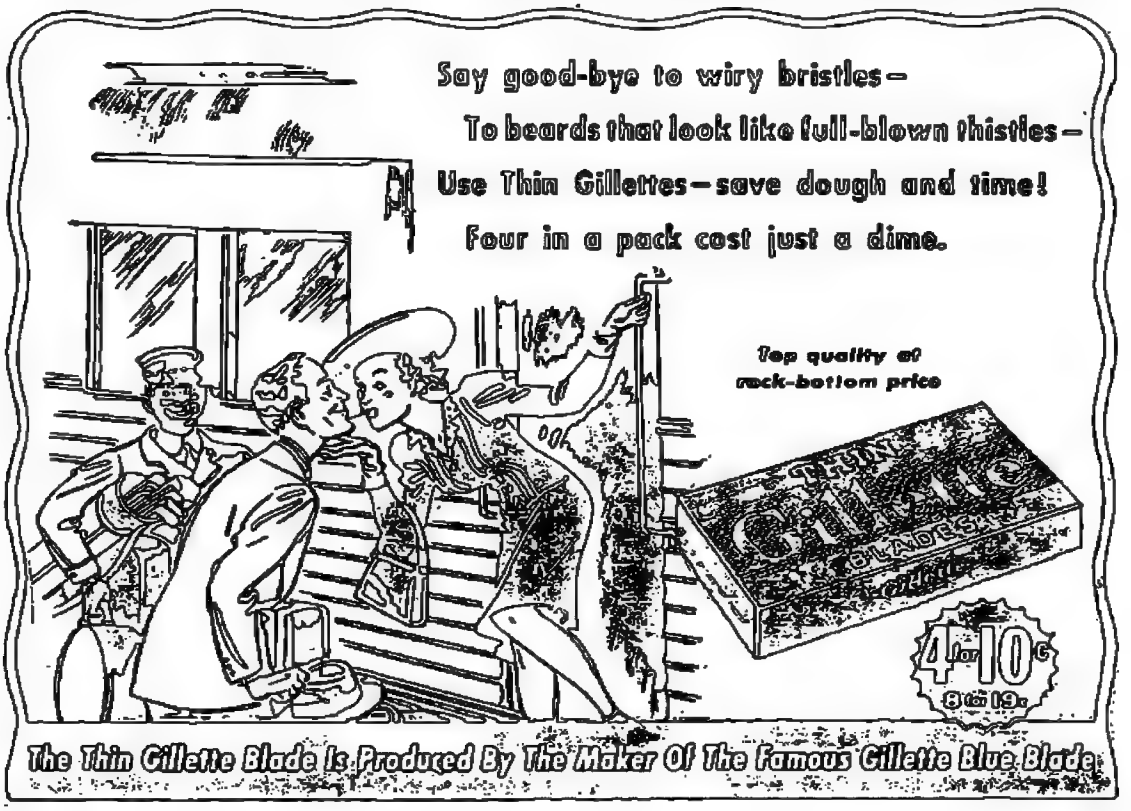
"These are not soldiers! Who are they? Gardinier of the Commune is with you, and—"

"Shut up, you fool!"

Germaine's gun swung up, but the young officer was snapping at his men: "Disarm these conspirators and place them under arrest."

The weapon in Josef Germaine's hands coughed, and a guardsmen wilted to the ground. Other guns spat swiftly, but the palace guard was swarming over the would-be rescuers and clubbing them down.

Demal, dropping to his knees, steadied his gun and took careful aim. He couldn't win, but it was better to end things like this. That shouting behind him—was it the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alert, ever-watchful citizens already swooping for the newest spectacle of bloodshed?

A gun butt crashed down over his head, and he spilled helplessly forward onto his face.

DEMAL'S eyes opened slowly and heavily. It was difficult to lift his eyelids, and when he finally managed it, the light cut like a knife. But he would not allow himself to drop back into unconsciousness. He had to remain awake, had to get back to the hotel and the Spark of Allah.

Gradually the light lost its stabbing edge, and he was able to see dank stone walls. He was lying on his back close to one of the musty walls, and the light was coming from a single feeble taper on a crude bench. A few feet away was a narrow cot on which dirty pieces of bedding were folded so that they showed the mattressless spring.

He put his hands down under him, and, pressing against the filthy floor, pushed himself up into a sitting position. But for a few moments he was too dazed to understand what had happened, and it was only when he glimpsed a tiny, barred window close to the ceiling that he realized he was in a prison cell.

His head ached painfully, and when he tried to get up throbbed excruciatingly. He sank back to the floor, mumbling: "They brought me here—although I'm a member of the Commune! Although the leaders of France are ready to take my orders!"

Then suddenly he laughed. And the sound was dryly grating. Yesterday he might have been potential dictator, but—then he had possessed the Spark of Allah. Now, without it, he was merely another wretch jailed for a political crime which meant nothing better than the guillotine.

A few hours back he had been a god, but his stupidity about the crystal—and Isabella—

His brain cleared. Isabella, of course. How anxious she had been to help him, to put away the coat in which he had left the Spark of Allah. Little, pretty, soft Isabella!

Someone was coming down the corridor, coming with light, quick steps, and he thought of the girl fluttering about his rooms at the Hotel des Rivoles. The footsteps halted, the door swung back and a woman stepped into the cell. Lucille Favras.

She looked down at him, and he closed his eyes against her stare. This was the finish, for, having escaped from prison herself, she had returned to make sure he did not go on living.

"You can look at me, monsieur." Her voice was low and bell-like. "You'll neither die nor go blind."

His eyes opened with slow disbelief, but then he met her green gaze indifferently, for death must come soon in one form or another, and perhaps this was the better way.

She shook her head at him. "You are going to live—for a long time. Get up and come with me."

He did not move. "Why?"

"I'm taking you out of here, across the border into Germany, where you'll be safe."

His lips stretched into a lifeless grin. "You can't get me out of here. Unless I'm mistaken, this is the Conciergerie, and there's no more impregnable prison in the city."

"You forget that I got out of it."

"Yes, you. But—" Suddenly he was alert, pulling himself to his feet. "Where are the others?"

"Here, in various cells. They'll

be executed within forty-eight hours. That's why you must hurry. I can't wait forever."

The thin, stretched line of his mouth jerked. "So, you want to help me escape."

"More than that"—impatiently. "You *will* escape. I'm taking you away. You know it is very simple now that I have the Spark of Allah. All the jailers are sleeping soundly—I took care of that."

"Ah-h. You have the crystal. And Isabella—"

LUCILLE paced restlessly across the dirty floor. "Yes, Isabella is charming, isn't she? But surely you realized that when I freed her from Cagliostro, I, in turn, gained control over her?"

"Then you planned the whole thing when you restored the sylphid to normal size."

"Of course, although it was a good lesson for Cagliostro at the same time."

"What have you done with Isabella now that she's served your purpose?"

"She's on her way to England. She'll do well there."

Demal was silent, and she touched his shoulder. "Why must you wait any longer?"

He shrugged. "Why are *you* waiting? Why don't you dispose of me as you did the soldier on the road to Versailles?"

Her hand remained on his shoulder. "I've never wanted to do that to you, monsieur. Not even when I was trying to get back my crystal. In spite of your stealing it, I had a warm liking for you from the first moment, and the liking is even greater now. That is the reason I am taking you to Germany."

"Liking? Lilith—the hungry, insatiable witch spirit, liking anything?"

Her green eyes rested on his face, but they were no longer threaded with fire. They were deep and tired. "Lilith, yes. But that doesn't mean what you think. What I had to do I did, but often I hated the results. Now that's all over, for I have my Spark of Allah—"

"Which you need to keep your ageless self young and beautiful."

She nodded. "Soon the century ends, and I'll go to the mountains to catch lightning fire with the crystal. Then I will be renewed."

"Perhaps. Or you may still be lying. Octavia may be Lilith, and the crystal hers."

She shook her head and smiled, very gently. "No. Octavia is my servant, but she is human. I've kept her with me for a long time by giving her the bath of blue fire at the same time I take it. But, of course, she becomes hideously aged before each century ends."

Demal stared at her, wondering if he really heard the softness of her voice or saw the beauty of her face. She stirred impatiently.

"Well, monsieur, I must go. Will you come with me? I'll take you to Germany and leave you there."

"And after that?" he demanded.

She lifted her hands swiftly. "After that—well, a long time afterward, we shall meet again."

"All right." He straightened and gravely offered his arm. "I'll go with you—gladly."

A moment later the cell door swung silently behind them, and the next day Demal was eating his dinner in a German inn, not sure of how he had gotten there, but refusing to believe that Lucille Favras had ever existed.

THE END.

The Moving Finger Writes,

---AND HAVING WRIT---

HM-M-M—seems like they can still "fight back with every weapon used against them."

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I thought I might attempt some sort of reply to Mr. Baer's letter, published in the April Unknown, since he puts it in the form of a challenge.

First, though, I think you'd enjoy knowing the circumstances under which this is being written. I've been bogged down for some days with bronchitis and for the last two days have had a nurse—whose chief function is to see that I stay in bed. She's a firm female, but this morning Unknown was brought to me and after some time, I discovered Mr. Baer's letter. I started out of bed and my way was blocked by the large, firm female. "Oh, no, you don't. Back in there."

"But"—I waved the magazine—"I want to write a letter."

"Don't hold with writing letters to magazines."

"You don't understand. I wrote a story for this magazine and somebody says I'm nuts. I want to put him in his place."

She eyed the magazine and her eyes brightened. She took it away from me and began to look through it. "You wrote a story? Hm-m-m," she stated. "Don't look the type to me. But this seems interesting, you know—" She sank into her chair, her eyes glued to it. Seizing opportunity, I dashed across the room and returned lugging half a dozen copies of Unknown.

"Here are some," I suggested. "There's the one I wrote. You see, I have to do something about this letter."

"Well . . . if you'll promise not to take too long and get right back into bed."

So now, the starchy gal has forgotten that I'm even around. She is deep in Unknown and completely fascinated. That's why I'm able to write this letter.

Now, as to Mr. Baer's letter. Of course, the witch-burnings never took place in Salem. I made that very clear in the story. Not only mentioning "Duck Acre," but telling of the carriages waiting to take the spectators back to Salem. However, he surely cannot be serious in stating that "Soldiers of the Black Goat" was placed in the period of 1691-1692. He cannot believe that this was the only "outburst" of witch persecution? Besides, it was not an outburst but a long-drawn-out madness which affected most parts of the world. Certainly, nothing in the story states that the period is 1691-1692. Also, the goodly people of Salem chased the devil around the stump by holding the executions outside of the town limits. When I am allowed to be more active, I will (if you wish) send a

list of the authorities on the subject of American witchcraft which will show a solid enough basis for "Soldiers of the Black Goat." At the moment I can refer you to the very interesting work "History of Witchcraft" published by the University of Pennsylvania two years ago. This deals with world-wide witchcraft but gives authorities on American witchcraft. Before writing "Soldiers of the Black Goat," I read some fifteen books on witchcraft, including the three-volume "History of Witchcraft" mentioned above.

Also, if Mr. Baer is connected with the writing trade (which I think he is) he ought to realize that in writing a story of this type, especially a fantasy, I took certain liberties concerning customs. Such as the gun-powder sack incident. The "sack" was not an American custom, but was widely practiced in other parts of the world. As to his sneer about the "innocent women sent to the fire"—I challenge him right back. Whenever I am free of these trying cold germs, I will be delighted to produce evidence which will make him recheck whatever facts he may (or might) possess.

The cry of Salem and its (mistaken) champions today is that the town is maligned. But, in "Soldiers of the Black Goat" it was made plain that no execution for witchcraft ever took place in the town of Salem. (Wish now that I'd called it something else.)

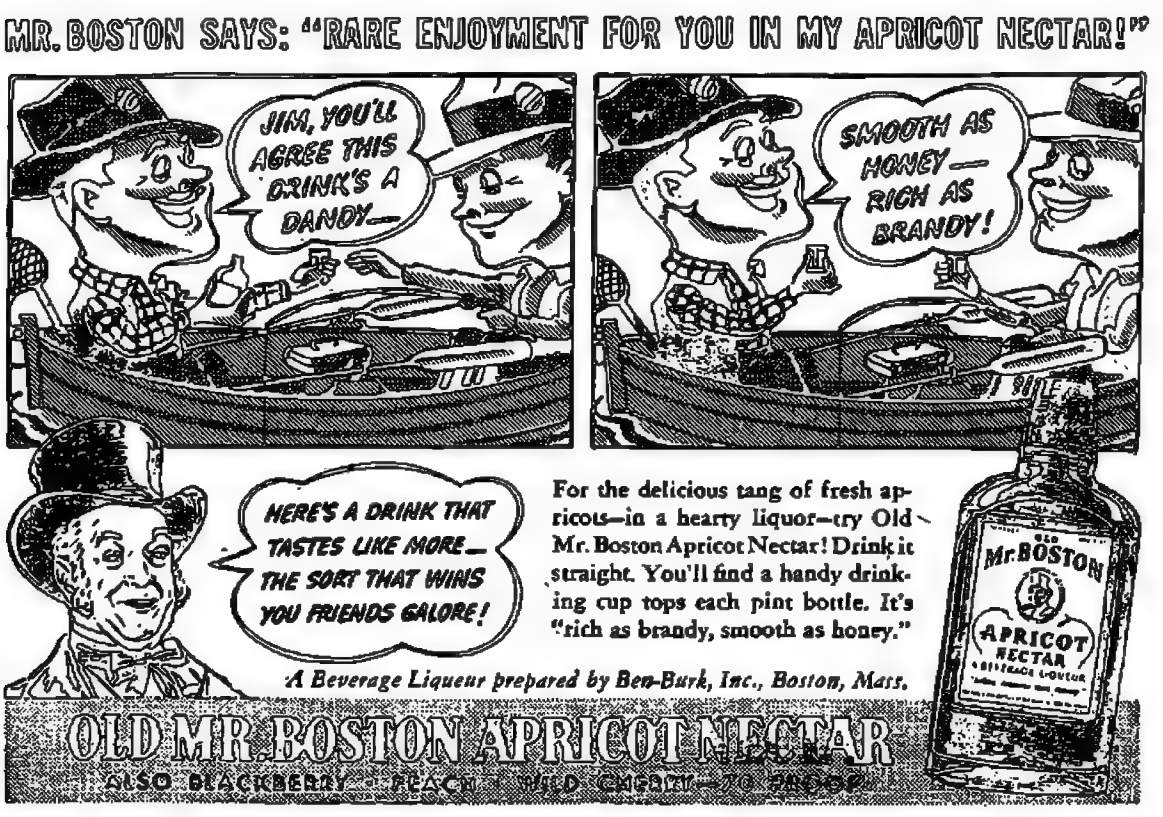
Then, too, introducing Mr. Baer's letter is the statement that whites did not use the stake because Indians burned their victims and the white would not resort to such barbarism. It sounds nice and we modern Americans certainly want to make lily-handed lads out of all our ancestors —as if they needed whitewashing! The pioneer whites paid the Indians back in their own coin and burned them alive whenever they got the chance. American history proves this pretty clearly. People weren't so squeamish in those days and noble wives and mothers killed, scalped and fought with every weapon the Indians used against them. There are some startling and heroic tales along these lines.

I hope this answers Mr. Baer's criticism. —Marian O'Hearn.

They both agree it was a yarn to read, though!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

In answer to Mr. Stern's letter in the April issue of Unknown in which he claimed that I had a great deal of gall in pro-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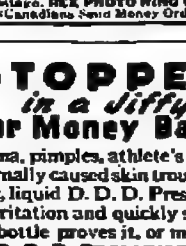

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claiming three other novels better than "Sinister Barrier."

I don't believe that it was fantasy; it had a different plot to it, but, nevertheless, it was still science-fiction. The lights, when comparing the story to other sf yarns, could be invaders from outer space, and certainly the methods used to eliminate them were very orthodox in many stories which you and I have both read. You will admit, I hope, that the only thing that could be called fantasy in the story was the idea of the lights being our rulers, and from then on it was straight sf. Russell may have aroused doubts in your mind about man's supremacy, as he certainly did in mine, but other than that, it is just a very convincing compiling of certain unexplainable facts.—Norman Knudson, 2516 Van Buren Avenue, Ogden, Utah.

Kuttner is an ardent devotee of Thorne Smith. It was not a steal; Kuttner is simply trying to write some of the stories Smith might have, had he lived longer.

Dear Editor:

I'm not given to "Fan Letters," but since Unknown is my favorite magazine, I feel that a word of approval would not be amiss.

It might interest you to know that I give my copies to the library when I finish with them—and they're always worn to rags before I get the next issue.

I think De Camp is your best bet. I liked "The Enchanted Week End" very much—humor is too much lacking, that is the satiric humor which your type of fiction calls for.

The April cover is the finest you've had—and boy, you've had some poor ones!

Apropos of Kuttner's "All Is Illusion" in the April issue: read Thorne Smith's "The Stray Lamb" and then kick Mr. Kuttner in the teeth for me. It's a bare-faced steal, and a poor one at that.

Anyhow, the best of luck—and when can you make Unknown a weekly, or daily?—W. Bovill, 3410 Lee, Greenville, Texas.

The original tree of life, of course!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I have read Unknown from the first issue. It is my second favorite magazine (*Astounding* is the first), yet, I have never taken time to designate my favorite sto-

ries, condemn a few, or to just tell you that the sum total is simply superb, exactly and extremely excellent, first-rate! I need offer no further proof of my lifelong devotion than the fact that, though my brain-child, my literary epic, my story-to-end-all-stories was returned to me within approximately a week, I still buy and read Unknown.

A few of the stories that met with my sincere approval were L. Ron Hubbard's yarns (with the possible exception of "The Ghoul"), "Sinister Barrier," (that made me shiver for weeks), "Divide and Rule," (that made me a laughing nuisance for a similar length of time), and "Death's Deputy." (But a question in regard to the last mentioned: Would a god of Death wear dirty robes—Earth dirt? I thought gods were supernatural beings much above such trifles as filth and smells?)

I didn't like so very much the Wan Tengri yarns, Steve Fisher's mess, nor the Boston witch—who was in reality a great scientist and a beautiful belle besides!

The short stories are, as a rule, well worth the price of the magazine. And the explanation of a ghost sub re the sinking of the *Athenia* is the only possible explanation since we have the most honorable and reliable word of all possible parties concerned that they are innocent. At first, I didn't think "Derm Fool" was an Unknown story, but on further examination I find that the strange snake is *unknown* and the disease is *unknown*, while I'm certain I don't know the characters, so—

Which brings me up to date (I believe—or else I'm doing a little time travel). "The Indigestible Triton" was amusing and seemed to suggest the technique of Hubbard, but perhaps I'm prejudiced. The ending of "All Is Illusion" increased its value with me one hundredfold. "He Shuttles" was interestingly written—and the theme was new. However, I have a few fragments of ossified tissue forming the skeleton of most vertebrate animals to pick with you. (I'll put the dictionary away now.) On page 93, in "The African Trick," by H. W. Guernsey, the peculiarly inclined female endeavors to give the impression that Vladimir Kirov was hanged—not choked to death. I have long been laboring under the impression that a body cannot be bruised after death, thus when the police remove the belt they will see the marks of fingers. No? What was the tree and why?

Thanks for a swell magazine.—Mary Evelyn Rogers, 2006 Court Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

She took convincing!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

You know I've hesitated subscribing to your magazine, being afraid that Unknown couldn't keep up a work begun so well. But every time I read the contributors' column I regret all the stories I've missed—so I'm inclosing a check for two dollars and forty cents. The two dollars for a year of Unknown without having to comb the newsstands, and the forty cents for the back copies containing "Divide and Rule," by L. Sprague de Camp. I only wish I could afford all the back copies of Unknown. Begin with May, 1940, on the subscription, please.

My favorite of all stories from Unknown is "Nothing in the Rules" by De Camp—an incomparable story. Every time I'm blue, I read it and cheer up immediately. I get the same lift, though much more mildly, from "The Enchanted Week End."

By and large I prefer the novelettes and short stories to the novels. "Vanderdecken," "He Shuttles" and "The Elemental" were outstanding. Of the novels "Death's Deputy" was the best, and "The Indigestible Tritan" was above average. "Sons of the Bear Gods" was the worst.

I have an entire little essay about your covers. To me they're pretty uniformly unappealing. The best ones being February and April of this year. Their single color effect being eye-pleasing though the actual picture was not brain-pleasing.

To your everlasting credit, however, your covers may seem inartistic and not up to the standard of your stories, but *they are honest and inoffensive*.

To digress a moment—by horror I mean a predominantly *mental* fear of the supernatural. I've read many things that were horrible because they were physically disgusting. I object to them very little when they're an organic part of a larger story, but I don't find them entertaining. A complete absence of them in Unknown is one of its best points.

"He Shuttles" had some of it and "Vanderdecker" was the best zoluple. Granting that your stories are more intelligent, I would very much like an occasional tale meant to terrify the reader without any of De Camp's masterly humor or Hubbard's reasonable characters.

Re-reading with an eye to content and ignoring lack of punctuation, spelling and illegibility, I find that my highest praise is for what Unknown is not rather than for all the fine things it is.

Again my very sincere thanks for Unknown, and I'll be looking forward with a great deal of pleasure to getting it regularly and, of course, to reading "Divide and Rule."—Cece Cook Garges, 2 Sumner Place, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Roses—complete with a thorn or two.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Unknown has, I think, proven rather agreeably that any hack not too far gone, can and will write fiction of above average literary quality if he has sufficient encouragement. Unknown has furnished that encouragement, it seems.

Of course, there have been slips. Such as the unfortunate line-up of shorts in the December issue, the stock weird theme of Walton's "Swamp Train," and the disgustingly logical "Living Ghost" and "Question Is Answered." But then pages must be filled, and it does take time to initiate writers into such a radically new style.

Not that they aren't learning with gratifying rapidity. The April issue had the finest fantasy shorts since the magazine was begun. This issue—

"The Roaring Trumpet." Rather disappointing. Must have expected too much. It was clever, made good reading, and far above the average, but it was not as good as the hilariously cockeyed "Lest Darkness Fall." And the end was a bit too pat.

"Mad Hatter." Satisfyingly screwy.

"Well of the Angels." This is a variation from Unknown's policy of sheer fantasy without rhyme or reason, told in a blunt, down-to-earth, take-it-or-leave-it manner. I'd like to see more of this sort. Too much of a good thing is quite likely to become too much of a good thing. Yet—even if I did like the variation, I didn't like the story. Perhaps it was because it was an old plot on the order of "The Monkey's Paw." Perhaps. But the real reason is, I believe, simply that I don't like Price. Why, I don't know. His style, outlook, something.

"The Pipes of Pan." Not exactly extraordinary, but not bad either. Average.

Isip is *not* a good cover artist. There is no detail in his work. It's much too insubstantial, too vague; goes all to pieces when examined closely. Use Rogers or Cartier on the covers and keep both Isips inside.

All in all, the May number is rather a letdown from the splendid April issue.

That's the trouble with putting out a superior issue. If the next is not fully as good, your readers go out into the back yard and bay at the moon.

Unknown is superseding *Astounding* as the fans' favorite magazine, too.—Joseph Gilbert, 3911 Park St., Columbia, So. Car.

Ley was mainly suggesting that reports needed careful weighing. Just look at current war reports!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Hardly fair to the Fortean movement is the title of Willy Ley's "short" appearing in the March issue of Unknown.

By the wording of the title is the suggestion made that Fort availed himself of newspaper data in making most of his claims—

The writer has carefully read Fort's works, and has copied many notes from them. I remember that a goodly proportion of these writings were taken from scientific books, periodicals; from the records of the various astronomical, meteorological and nautical institutes and societies, and the like. Therefore, Willy Ley's title is not well taken; it tends to detract from the possible importance of the Fortean idea—which, it is not inconceivable, may some day provoke inquiries that will have a likelihood to influence the general trends of scientific investigation.

It probably will not be ill-advised to say this:

We do not yet know all the possible ramifications of this cosmos—there may be fields of inquiry not yet touched by science: Fields in which no man has yet set his mark. At any time mankind may discover some new field of investigation. He may as easily discover it through the results of compilations of news reports as through the results of sober scientific investigation or through the hiatuses in the scientific schemes of cosmology. Forteanism deserves a hearing with all the rest. It may, some day, uncover new fields to pioneer.

Otherwise I have no criticism of March Unknown. One can little afford to criticize work he cannot duplicate—and I could certainly not duplicate the work appearing in the stories I have read—at any time—in this magazine. I say: keep it up! The "wish-fulfillment" literature to be found in Unknown is not being approached

anywhere else.—David G. Markham, Box 613, Sacramento, Calif.

We're trying for those readers—

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I want to congratulate you on your move in regard to the cover of Unknown. It does not belong to the class with which it has so far been associated, and deserves the best following of readers it can get—people who are not apt to be looking among the pulps for reading matter. *Astounding*, too, has a far higher grade of story than the other science-fiction magazines. Wishing you continued success—L. Crutchfield, Stowe, Vermont.

Maybe Isip did all his fishing in the Philippines—his home.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

The July Unknown has just appeared here, and it is truly an event. The new cover is the finest in the history of fantasy magazines. If *Astounding* adopted the same style, it wouldn't do any harm, though the past few covers have been superb.

As for the stories—you have two gems, not one. "Fear" is wonderful; "The Dream" is priceless, though it isn't really new anywhere. The serial looks good so far. But "Fisherman's Luck" suffered from everything, even the illustration. If Mason was trout fishing, I doubt he'd be using a heavy salmon or surf rod, with a surf-casting reel, such as Isip pictures. Long stated the rod was light—it's a shame. I always liked Isip, too. Not only that—but if it were a light fly rod, would Mason try to derrick the head in, as shown and—I believe—mentioned in the story? Magic rod? It must have been, to lift the girl through the window; but wouldn't a trout man like Mason have noticed something strange about it if he *had* hauled it—the head—in as Isip shows? I fear that though Mr. Long may have been trout fishing at some time—his exaggerations weren't so bad—that Mr. Isip must have been misled by a Montauk surf angler. We trout men are wondering.

The werewolf story was fairly good, but not your usual standard. Otherwise this was a delectable issue. Let's have more such spine chillers. Your philosophy of "there are no ghosts and such—maybe," is just what this smug world needs. We don't know so much, after all; and with things like "None But Lucifer." "Sinister Barrier."

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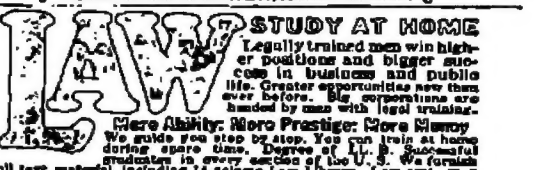
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"Fear," et cetera, being given us, we begin to think it over.

With that, then, best wishes for the second year.—Allan Keniston, Jr., Vineyard Haven, Mass.

"On the reliability of newspaper clippings."

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Much as I esteem him after our one never-to-be-forgotten meeting, I'm afraid I've got to charge Willy Ley with dodging the issue in his filler about the reliability of newspaper clippings. Few will disagree with his complaint of journalistic inaccuracy, but why does he drag in Charles Fort? Does he think Fort is responsible?

Fort treated press reports with considerable suspicion, and tried to get confirmation of data whenever it was possible to get it. Even then he treated his material, *as well as his own theories*, with skepticism that at least was honest. Unlike some scientists, he was never guilty of offering his theories as if they were established facts. He said, "I believe nothing," and sometimes humorously complained of people who did their best to convert him to his own theories.

I fancy that Willy's faint antagonism to Fort is based on the belief that criticism of dishonesty in science is criticism of all science—though I have yet to find a Fortean who thinks all scientists dishonest. Neither are all press reports twaddle. The press reported the existence of the okapi while biologists were still denying its possibility. And from where did Willy get his data for "It Happens Twice At Least"—did he see the *Thetis* go down, or did he read about it in the papers?

It is not without point that, in the last five or six years, the most serious and effective criticism of the most dogmatic side of science has come not from followers of Charles Fort, but from fellow hecklers of considerable scientific prominence. Einstein, for instance, has fallen foul not only of Forteans, but also people like Lecturer in Mathematics Eagles, of Manchester University, and Professor A. E. Milne, of Oxford.

"The gap between science and ordinary life is artificially broadened by some scientists who behave like so many magicians, and try to prove that science is mysterious, and a great many other people who don't want the ordinary man to know too much." Sorry, Willy, but it wasn't Fort who said that—it was Professor J. B. S. Haldane, F. R. S.—Eric Frank Russell, Liverpool, 20, England.

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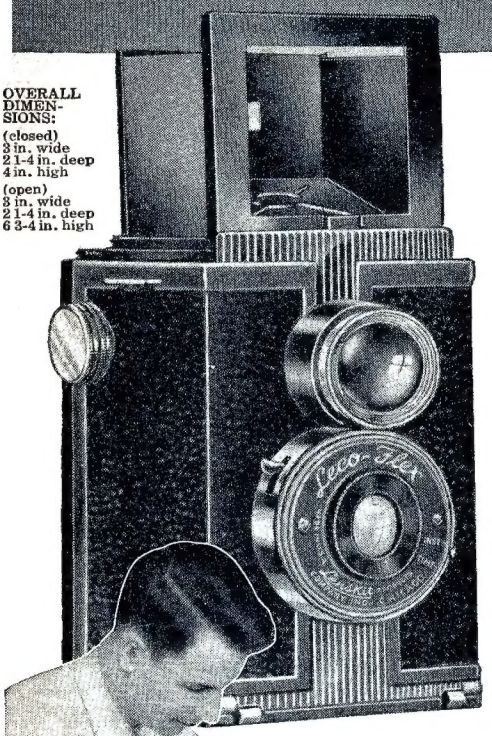
2 1-4 in. deep
6 3-4 in. high



It's Easy! It's Thrilling! It's Instructive! It's Fascinating!

Putting a Precision Camera Like This Together is More Fun Than Any Hobby You've Ever Enjoyed

IF YOU are the kind of fellow who gets a big "kick" out of making useful, clever things with your own hands all by yourself . . . if you think taking pictures is fun . . . just imagine the pleasure of taking pictures with a camera BUILT WITH YOUR OWN HANDS!

Words can't describe the thrill of seeing this fine, modern double-lens reflex "grow" under your very eyes as you assemble the precision LensKit parts one by one. And the fun of assembling is just the BEGINNING. The 12 sharp, clear, 2¼"x2¼" pictures the LensKit takes on each roll of Eastman 620 or Agfa PB20 film will delight you for years to come. Your friends won't believe they were taken with a camera you built yourself.

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

No complicated tools are required. To enjoy this fascinating hobby all you need is: simple tools, patience, and the ability to follow the simple step-by-step instructions included with each LensKit. Your kitchen table can be your workbench.

NOT A TOY—BUT A REAL PRACTICAL CAMERA

Ask any expert . . . he'll tell you the twin-lens reflex is the coming trend. It's simpler to operate . . . the full-picture-size upright image on the ground glass view finder shows exactly how the picture looks when you take it. Even a small child can snap pictures with a LensKit camera.

Here Are Some of the Features of the LensKit Reflex (the kind you usually look for on much more expensive cameras):

● One-Piece Die-Cast Metal Housing ● Simple, Positive-Acting Rotary Shutter ● Multi-Dimensional Fixed-Focus 75-mm Meniscus Lens ● Two Viewfinders: "Eye-level" for fast-moving objects; also separate, upright-image, brilliant ground-glass finder for critical portrait or snapshot photos. YOU SEE WHAT YOU GET BEFORE SNAPPING THE PICTURE. ● Tripod Socket with Standard Thread ● Separate Brilliant Viewfinder Lens ● Leather Carrying Strap ● Two-Way Exposure: Snap or Time.

THE "BUILD-IT-YOURSELF" LENSKIT

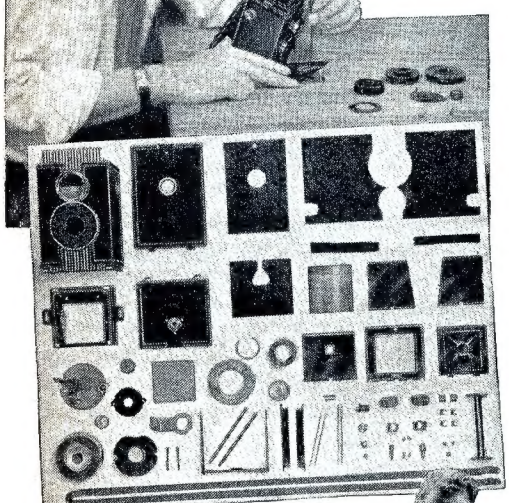
includes everything you need . . . all precision-made parts, including completely assembled shutter unit; simple detailed drawings and comprehensive easy-to-understand assembling and operating instructions; all for only $3.95, postpaid.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED!

Send for your LensKit today! Enjoy the fun, the fascination, the thrill of building this useful, modern precision-made reflex. Think of the pleasure you'll get out of taking sharp, clear, perfectly-framed negatives that can be printed 2¼" x 2¼" by contact, or enlarged 20 diameters or more.

The complete LensKit is only $3.95, postpaid, when remittance in full accompanies your order. If you prefer, you may send only $1.00 and we will ship your LensKit C.O.D. for balance, plus mailing charges. You save the mailing charges when you send cash in full. All parts in the LensKit are guaranteed against defects in material or workmanship for one year.

EASY TO ASSEMBLE. Instructive for beginners. A fine extra REFLEX for advanced amateurs at low cost.



LENSKIT includes everything from neckstrap to screws. You see what you snap when you look down into viewfinder.

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LensKit TRADE MARK

LENSKIT PRODUCTS COMPANY, Inc., 435 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. 50, Chicago

FILL OUT AND MAIL THE CONVENIENT COUPON BELOW!

LENSKIT PRODUCTS COMPANY, Inc.
435 North Michigan Avenue, Dept. 50, Chicago, Illinois

Gentlemen: [ ]I enclose $1.00 for the complete LensKit. Send C. O. D. for balance, plus a few cents mailing charges.

[ ] I enclose remittance in the amount of $3.95. Please send me postpaid immediately the complete LensKit.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

THE ALEXANDER TWINS...Dorothy and Grace, Famous Drum Majorettes for American Legion Post 42, Martinsville, Virginia

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AND SALUTE

Chesterfield

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